Phantom Limb Pain

Phantom limb pain is the pain that occurs in an extremity following an amputation. It is pain in an *extremity* (arm or leg) that no longer exists. This pain varies with different amputees. Different activities may precipitate the pain. Some amputees experience the opposite of phantom pain - phantom pleasure.

The trouble may start in a part of the brain known as the sensory cortex. The sensory cortex is the portion of your brain which feels *sensations* (feelings) from the rest of your body. Perhaps when a body part is lost the corresponding part of the brain is not able to handle the loss and rewires its circuitry to make up for the signals it was no longer receiving from the missing part. The exact mechanism of how phantom limb pain occurs is not known.

The severity of pain seems to be correlated with personal problems such as, stress and attitudes. It also seems to correlate with the amount of pain before the operation.

Phantom limb pain can be severe and debilitating. There are a number of different therapies that may give relief. **Do not be disheartened if you do not obtain immediate relief. Keep working with your caregiver or with a pain center until relief is obtained.**

Some treatments that may be helpful include:

- Hypnosis and mental imagery - their techniques can give patients the needed impetus to recognize their ability to regain control.
- Biofeedback.
- Relaxation techniques are related to hypnosis techniques by using the mind and body to control pain.

See your caregiver and work with them if relief is not obtained.

Document Released: 03/09/2004
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.