Amputation (General Information)

Many new amputations occur each year. The most common causes of amputation of the lower extremity (the hip down) are:

- Disease.
- Injury caused in an accidents or wars (*trauma*).
- Birth defects.
- Lumps (*tumors*) that are cancer.

Upper extremity amputation is usually the result of trauma or birth defect, with disease being a less common cause.

PROBLEMS COMMONLY FACED

After an amputation a number of issues need to be considered. Getting around and self-care are early problems that must be dealt with. A complete rehabilitation program will help the amputee recover mobility. A team approach of caregivers helps the most. Caregivers that can provide a well rounded program include:

- Physicians.
- Therapists.
- Nurses.
- Social workers.
- Psychologists.

Usually there are problems with body image and coping with lifestyle changes. A grieving period similar to dealing with a death in the family is common after an amputation. Talking to a trained professional with experience in treating people with similar problems can be very helpful.

When returning to a previous lifestyle, questions about sexuality can arise. Many of these uncertainties are normal. These can be discussed with your psychologist or rehabilitation specialist.

REHABILITATION AND RETURN TO WORK AND ACTIVITIES

Returning to recreational activities and employment are part of recovery. Many times, changes to recreation equipment can allow return to a sport or hobby. A device that substitutes the missing part of the body is called a prosthetic. Many prosthetic manufacturers produce components designed for sports. Be sure to discuss all of your leisure interests with your *prosthetist.* This is the person who helps provide you with custom made replacement limbs. Your physician will also help to select a prosthetic that will meet your needs.

Employers will vary in their willingness to change a work environment in order to help people with disabilities. Your therapists can perform job site evaluations. Your therapist can then make recommendations to help with your work area. Some amputees will not be able to return to previous jobs. Your local Office of Vocational Rehabilitation can assist you in job retraining.

Once you are past the initial rehabilitation stage you will have ongoing contact with caregivers and a prosthetist. You need to work closely with them in making decisions about your prosthetic device.

PROGNOSIS

Amputation should not end your joy of life. There are people with limb loss in nearly all walks of life. They are in a wide variety of professions. They participate in nearly all sports. Ask your caregivers about support groups and sports organizations in your area. They can help you with referral to organizations that will be helpful to you.

Document Released: 09/09/2003 Document Re-Released: 03/14/2011
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