

# Limb Loss



## General Information

An amputation is the loss of part or all of a limb or extremity. A limb, also called an “extremity” is another word for arm or leg. An amputation may be needed if the limb no longer functions because of an injury or it may be a planned operation to prevent other problems. After an amputation, the part of the arm or leg that remains on the body is called a *residual limb*.

Here are some reasons for an amputation:

- Severe injury
- Decreased blood flow infections
- Tumors
- Severe burns
- Injury due to extreme cold (frostbite)
- Wounds that do not heal

*Talk to your doctor about medical issues specific to your child.*

## Residual Limb Wound Care

- Wound care/dressing changes
  - Wash hands before and after wound care
  - Notify your nurse if your dressing is soiled, leaking, or coming off
- Check for signs or symptoms of infection- redness, swelling, drainage, foul odor, fever.
- Prevent contractures, a condition where the muscles, tendons, or other tissue become short and hard.
- Wrap the residual limb tightly in a bandage or other material to help to stop the limb from swelling Your healthcare provider will provide wrapping guidelines.
- To help your residual limb feel less sensitive, your health care provider can show you some desensitization

techniques.

## Skin Care

- Wash your limb with mild soap and water every day and pat it dry with a soft towel. Allow it to dry completely to avoid risk of fungal growth or infection.
- Check your limb twice a day to make sure that the skin is not torn or broken down. If you can't see the end of your residual limb, use a mirror.
- If you have reduced or no sensation (feeling) in your residual limb, check your limb more frequently during the day.
- Keep your limb away from things that may injure it such as heat or sharp objects.
- If your limb is covered all the time, be very careful if you expose it to the sun. Use sunscreen SPF 30 or better.
- Softening cream should only be used if the skin is extremely dry and at risk of cracking. It should only be used temporarily unless told otherwise by your doctor.
- Do not use alcohol or unknown chemicals/creams on your limb.
- Do not shave your limb as this can lead to infection from ingrown hairs.
- If the skin of your limb opens, go straight to your doctor.

## Skin Care with a Prosthesis (if applicable)

- When appropriate, a healthcare provider may evaluate your limb for a prosthesis. A prosthesis is a device that replaces a missing body part.
- If this is part of your treatment plan, your care team will provide additional information.

## Department of Rehabilitation

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## Pain and Other Sensations

**Residual Limb Pain** is pain experienced in the residual portion of the limb/stump. The intensity, frequency and duration vary from person to person.

**Phantom Limb** is a common experience with limb loss. The intensity, frequency and duration vary from person to person.

- *Phantom Limb Sensation* is any sensation of the missing limb except pain.
- *Phantom Limb Pain* is nerve pain that may present as painful sensations in the missing part of your limb.

**Treatment** is typically a combined approach with medication and rehabilitation, including physical and psychological components.

*Talk with your doctor about any sensation or pain issues specific to your child.*

## Social & Emotional Support

Each person has different experience following the loss of a limb. Some things to know are:

- **Feelings**- Depression and anxiety are normal feelings with limb loss.
- **Support**- Counseling, family, friends, and community groups are good places to build a support system.
- **Body Image**- Loss of a limb can negatively affect your child's body image and can cause them to be unhappy with their appearance. Refer to the CHLA Body Image handout or ask your care provider for more details.
- **Help**- Ask your social worker for help finding resources or with tips on coping and dealing with changes.

*Family support and involvement are important for a positive recovery.*



### Resources

[www.amputee-coalition.org](http://www.amputee-coalition.org)

[www.limbsforlife.org](http://www.limbsforlife.org)

[www.Nolimitsfoundation.org](http://www.Nolimitsfoundation.org)

[www.angelcitysports.org](http://www.angelcitysports.org)

[www.challengedathletes.org](http://www.challengedathletes.org)

[www.disabilityrightsca.org](http://www.disabilityrightsca.org)

[www.taskca.org](http://www.taskca.org)