

Managing Pain After Amputation Surgery



No matter what kind of surgery you have, pain is always a concern. As with any surgery, pain after amputation can be controlled. This can help you stay more comfortable. People react to pain in different ways. So learn how to describe your pain to your healthcare team. This means explaining where the pain is, how it feels, and how bad it is. This lets the healthcare team know how best to treat your pain.

Types of residual limb pain

Pain in your residual limb can be coming from different places. The following are the most common sources of limb pain after amputation:

- **Skin pain.** Your skin can be very sensitive after amputation. Pain from your skin can feel sharp or irritating.
- **Nerve pain.** This can range from tingling to feeling like an electric shock. The source of nerve pain may be a neuroma. A neuroma occurs when the ends of cut nerves grow into a painful ball under the skin.
- **Muscle pain.** This can feel like aching and cramping.
- **Bone pain.** This can occur if the end of the bone presses against the socket of your prosthesis. It may cause deep or sharp pain.
- **Phantom pain.** This is a pain felt in the missing limb after amputation and is a real pain thought to originate in the brain.

Explaining your pain

Pain relief plays a big part in your recovery. So be honest when a healthcare provider asks about your degree of pain. They may ask you to describe your level of pain. On a scale of 0 to 10 (where 0 means no pain, and 10 is the worst pain), how bad is the pain? Also describe the type of pain. Is it aching, burning, sharp, twisting, or dull? Or does it feel like an electric shock? Tell them how often the pain is happening and if it is linked to certain activities.

Treating pain

Your healthcare provider may need to try different medicines or dosages. This can help find the most effective way to treat your pain. The most common pain medicines used after surgery are opioids. Opioids block pain signals on their way to the brain. This means they can control even severe pain. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) may also be used. Like opioids, NSAIDs block pain signals on their way to the brain. Your healthcare provider may also try antidepressants or anticonvulsant medicines. They are often used to treat depression and seizures. But they have also proven effective at relieving pain related to amputation. Always ask your healthcare provider about possible side effects of the medicines you may be prescribed. These may include drowsiness, constipation, and becoming dependent on the medicine. There are other treatments your provider may recommend if medicines alone don't help control your pain. Here are examples of other treatments that may be effective:

- Acupuncture
- TENS (transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation)
- Biofeedback
- Massage therapy
- Hypnosis

- Meditation

The pain is telling you something!

Pain is your body's way of pointing out a problem. So don't try to "tough it out." If your pain is not lessening after treatment, say so. Don't act brave or worry about being a pest. Medicines and other treatments can be adjusted to meet your needs. Remember that the goal of amputation is to help restore function. Pain can be a barrier to your recovery. Finding what works for you is what really matters. Work with your amputation healthcare team to resolve pain issues as they occur during your recovery.

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