

WATER ACTIVITY PROSTHESES

An everyday prosthesis is not water proof. It can be safely used in wet weather but is not intended for wearing in water, such as a shower or the sea.



Water activity limbs (WAL), also known as 'wet legs', are especially designed to be safe and durable in a wet environment. They are not intended for swimming with as such but rather for walking and standing in and around water. They have advantages and disadvantages:

Advantages

Water activity limbs are totally water resistant. You can wear them in the shower, in the pool and poolside, and in and around water.

There are different types depending on the functional requirements. The details should be discussed with your treating clinician. Some are exoskeletal, meaning they are hollow. When immersed in water they fill up with water. This adds weight to the limb so that it does not float. When you get out of the water, the water will flow out of a hole at the inside of your ankle.

Others are made from water resistant modular components without a cover. They can function better but do not look like a leg (pictured).

Disadvantages

There are very few mechanical parts to a water activity limb. This means that the knee and/or foot components are very basic. They are chosen not because of their functional capacity but because of their ability to withstand a wet environment. They are almost always inferior to the prosthesis used for general use. When walking in them, you will need to have good strength in your muscles to make up for the lack of movement in the prosthetic foot. Your physiotherapist will teach you how to do this if need be.

The prosthetic knee will be a simple knee joint with a hand operated knee lock. This means that you can lock the knee straight manually for either walking or standing, in water or on dry land. You can walk with a free knee swing but you will need to use your hip muscles to stabilise the knee and stop it giving way. Your physiotherapist will show you how.

Due to the nature of the components, walking in your water activity leg for any distance or length of time will be quite tiring.

Swimming

Most people find that it is easier to swim without their water activity prosthesis on and therefore remove it once they are in the water. It can be put back on to climb out of the water.

A specialised component can be fitted for scuba diving, which has a flipper attachment.

Suspension

Your water activity limb will be held on using a silicone interface or liner. A supplementary belt may be required too. You should have a liner and belt just for this limb alone, as it will get wet and cannot, therefore, be used with your everyday leg until it dries out.

Care of water activity limb

Always rinse saltwater and sand from the prosthesis and allow to dry completely after use. If it has a flexible socket brim, remove this and let it dry separately before repositioning it.

Check any locking mechanisms, such as liners or knees, to make sure they function safely before use.

PACE Rehabilitation