



Keeping fit – staying independent

Why is exercise good for you after an amputation?

The fitter you can be, the better your body will cope with using your prosthesis.

The stronger your body control, the better you will control your prosthesis and the easier daily tasks will become.

The prosthesis creates a negative force on the body structures (muscle and skeleton) which if left uncontrolled will cause eventual changes to body posture. This in turn affects how muscles perform, resulting in weakness, strain on the ligaments and loss of balance, not to mention aches and pains in the joints. Exercise helps you to stay more symmetrical, rather than letting your amputation side become weak and inactive, that in turn cause other parts of the body to compensate and become overused.

How should I exercise?

To maintain your health and fitness you need an exercise regime that you will enjoy and that is convenient to your week. Having a routine is best.

Any exercise programme should contain elements that address strength, balance, posture, co-ordination and cardio-vascular fitness.

What type of exercise?

Yoga/Pilates: Do as many of the exercises as normal. Try them all, the prosthetic restriction will be apparent. You may wish to remove your prosthesis for some positions, which you could perform all at one go to avoid putting your leg on and off too much. Be mindful of posture all the time – keeping pelvis level and symmetrical, perhaps using a mirror to ensure that you do not twist out of position.

Stretching: Ideally, you should perform a general top to toe stretch twice a week. Specific stretches given to you by your physiotherapist should be repeated daily. Stretching realigns the skeleton and lengthens the muscles, keeping you flexible.

Some stretches will need to be slightly modified to accommodate a prosthesis.

Strengthening: Perform weights in the gym, both upper limb and lower limb. Most pieces of equipment will be fine except the hamstring curls and quadriceps leg extension if you're wearing a leg prosthesis. Cycling and step machines are good. Theraband also provides good resistance. Repeat strength sessions twice a week. Stair climbing leg over leg and wall sits are good ways to leg strengthen as an everyday activity at home.

Balance & co-ordination: Once you have mastered tightrope walking and the tennis ball, practise these once a week to keep your skills finely tuned. We use our muscles based on what we feel, so you need to be able to 'feel' the prosthesis – i.e. sense where it is and how you are stood on it.

Cardiovascular (CV): High impact exercise can cause trauma to the skin in your socket after a while, such as bruising and blisters. Running is not the best way to keep fit if there is an alternative.

Swimming, cycling (with toe clips), walking on treadmill (especially on incline), power walking outdoors with walking poles, stepper machine and rowing are all good forms of CV exercise. You are aiming at increasing your heartbeat for about 30 minutes.

You could do a mixture of these exercises to make up the 30 minutes.

Remember - the recommendation is 5 times a week, but housework, dancing, shopping, dog walking and gardening all count too!

Useful websites

Inclusive Fitness Initiative - can provide a buddy if you don't want to exercise alone.

See http://www.efds.co.uk/inclusive_fitness

Otto Bock Fitness App -<http://www.ottobock-group.com/en/otworld/apps/fitness-app/>

Running with a prosthesis - <http://www.amputee-running.com/>