Vascular Surgery

Lower Limb Amputation

Aim

This information is to help answer any questions you might have now and explain what to expect after your lower limb amputation and in the first few weeks at home. Do not hesitate to ask any of your nurses or doctors if you have questions while in hospital.

You can find further information regarding vascular illnesses at www.circulationfoundation.org.uk

If you have any concerns after your discharge please contact our vascular nurse specialists on 01223 596382.

What happened during the operation?

Your surgeon will have explained what your operation involved before and after your operation, and you should have been provided with written information on your consent form.

There are two types of this operation; above knee amputation and below knee amputation. The decision where to amputate is based on how likely the leg is to heal due to your blood supply. The muscles and skin are carefully closed to make a wound over the stump and dressings are applied. The operation takes 40 to 60 minutes to perform.

Do I have stitches?

For this operation, your surgeon may have used either stitches or staples. Ask your doctor or nurse if you are unsure. Both are usually removed three weeks after your operation.

- **Dissolvable sutures**: your sutures might be dissolvable, in which case you will not be able to see them and do not need to have them removed.

- **Non-dissolvable sutures or staples**: if your sutures are non-dissolvable, they will either be removed before you leave hospital (on the ward) or we will arrange for your practice nurse to remove them after you return home.
Do I need to do anything to the wound dressing?

It is normal for this type of wound to ooze a little for a few days. If your wound is still oozing a little when you go home, do not worry - ward staff arrange for a nurse to continue to dress your wound. We will also keep an eye on it when you return to the outpatient clinic.

When can I return to my normal activities?

In the first instance after an amputation you will not return immediately to normal activities. You will however be seen by a dedicated amputee physiotherapy team who will start your rehabilitation while in hospital. They will provide you with a personalised plan which will include information on exercises that you can perform and getting you back to normal activities and work.

I am not sure about medicines after I leave the hospital

Continue taking your usual medications unless you have been told otherwise.

You might have been given the following medicines to take after you leave hospital:

- **Antibiotics**: these are to prevent or treat infection. It is always very important that you complete the course of antibiotics. If you have problems taking them for any reason, contact your GP.

- **Anti-platelet agents (aspirin/clopidogrel)/cholesterol lowering tablets (statins)**: These might have been prescribed for you by your hospital doctor or your GP. You might have started them while you were staying in hospital or after you left. They can help protect you from heart attacks and strokes and you should take them for as long as your doctor tells you, which can be for the rest of your life. If you have problems taking them, for example side-effects, please contact your GP who can offer you advice and maybe some alternatives.

- **Painkillers**: All patients are seen by a dedicated team who expertise in pain while in hospital. If we have given you some stronger painkillers to take home with you, take them as directed. Most patients find they can stop taking them soon after leaving hospital - maybe changing to their usual 'over the counter' tablets. If you are worried, contact your GP.

Phantom pain

You may experience the sensation of the missing limb. Sometimes this can cause discomfort or pain. If you find you are struggling with phantom pain, see your GP who may prescribe you some specific painkillers. You may also experience spasms in your stump that your GP should be able to help with.

I am feeling constipated, what can I do?

A common side effect of 'stronger than usual' painkillers is constipation. In which case try to change to less strong ones as soon as you can.
To avoid becoming constipated, drink plenty of fluids (for example water), and eat as much fibre as you can, especially fruit and vegetables. It can also help to keep active.

All of these will be good for your recovery and general health. If this does not help your constipation, contact your GP.

**How about washing?**

You may take your usual shower or bath after a week once your wound is dry and as advised by the occupational therapist. However, do not soak your wound for a time, and try to avoid using perfumed toiletries because they can irritate wounds.

Make sure you dry the wound area carefully after washing to help it heal.

You will be given some information on the long-term care of your stump from the physiotherapy departments.

**I feel very tired after the surgery, should I be worried?**

It is your body’s way of recovering. You have had a major operation, which is stressful for your body. It will probably take one to three weeks before you feel as well as you did before this surgery. Rest when you feel tired.

**Counselling**

There is a counselling service available at the Disablement Service Centre. If you feel you would like to use this, your GP can refer you as well as the amputee physiotherapists.

**Why do I need to return to your outpatient clinic?**

You will be seen once by your surgeons who will check your wound has healed and that there are no complications from the surgery. You will also have appointments to attend the amputee gym and the disablement services centre. These are to check the progress of your stump, to fit you with an artificial leg if you are suitable and to help you regain as much independence as possible.

**What should I look out for after I return home?**

If your stump becomes painful, red and inflamed looking, it may have an infection. You should go to your GP. If the stump suddenly becomes white or feels very cold, contact your GP straight away or come to the Emergency Department (A&E/casualty) at Addenbrooke’s.

You should also take extra precautions with your other leg. If it becomes suddenly painful, cold and white you should seek urgent medical attention. If you experience a
gradual onset of pain when you walk or at rest you should make an appointment with your GP.

There are also other things you can do to protect the other leg.

- Wash and dry your foot daily. Ensure the foot is completely dry. Use this opportunity to inspect your foot for skin problems especially broken skin.
- Wear a well-fitting shoe that does not rub. Lace-up shoes are the best.
- Apply a small amount of emollient cream to your foot and rub it in thoroughly but gently, you ideally twice a day.
- Take care when cutting your toenails or arrange to see a chiropodist.
- If you detect broken skin that does not heal within a few days, make an appointment to see your GP.

**Why have you told me to stop/cut down my smoking?**

Smoking is very bad for the health of your blood vessels. It damages the arterial lining which allows the build up of plaque that causes the blockage.

Giving up smoking (or cutting right down) is one of the best things you can do for your health.

**I am struggling to give up smoking, where can I get some help?**

There are many ways you can be helped to stop smoking. There are new medications that can help you. Please do not think you are on your own.

See the end of this information for useful contact numbers. Your GP practice is a very good place to start.

**Contacts for help to stop smoking:**

**Camquit** is a local 'stop smoking' specialist service; you can contact them directly or through your GP practice. Their telephone numbers are:

- Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire 01223 723022
- East Cambridgeshire and Fenland 0800 018 4304
- Huntingdon 01480 418693
- Website: [www.camquit.nhs.uk](http://www.camquit.nhs.uk)

- There is also a national **NHS Stop Smoking Helpline**: 0800 169 0 169 (textphone: 0800 169 0 171) and website: [www.givingupsmoking.co.uk](http://www.givingupsmoking.co.uk)
You can also pick up copies of the free ‘Giving it up for life’ booklet from the Information Centre at Addenbrooke’s. This has a lot of attractively presented useful advice.

Privacy & Dignity

Same sex bays and bathrooms are offered in all wards except critical care and theatre recovery areas where the use of high-tech equipment and/or specialist one to one care is required.

We are a smoke-free site: smoking will not be allowed anywhere on the hospital site. For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169.

Other formats:

If you would like this information in another language or audio, please contact Interpreting services on telephone: 01223 256998, or email: interpreting@addenbrookes.nhs.uk For Large Print information please contact the patient information team: patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Document history

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