Peke Waihanga

Amputees Federation of New Zealand Incorporated

Caring for Your Artificial Lower Limb

Contents

Introduction

Artificial limbs are mechanical devices made up of different parts that work together to help you move. Like any piece of equipment, your artificial limb needs regular care and maintenance to keep it working well.

Keep the socket and liner of your artificial limb clean and free from dirt, dust and fluff. This will help your artificial limb work properly. Also ensure your stump socks are clean.

Check your artificial limb regularly for signs of wear and tear. If you notice any of the following, do not put your artificial limb on. Contact your prosthetist for maintenance or repairs if you notice:

- The liner is loose (it has unwound from the locking pin)
- A crack in the socket
- Any new and unexpected noises coming from your artificial limb
- New excessive movement in your artificial limb

Do not try to adjust screws, bolts, hinges or other parts of your artificial limb yourself.

Your prosthetist should check your artificial limb **every 12 months**. **You may need it checked sooner** if your prosthetist or rehab team recommends it, or if you notice problems with how your artificial limb fits or works.

Normal use

Your artificial limb is **designed for use in normal conditions** and environments. However, depending on your needs and what you want to do, your artificial limb may be made and fitted with components to suit different environments and activities. For example:

- **Wet or dusty environments** – your artificial limb is not waterproof unless you have been given a waterproof limb. **Do not** put your artificial limb under water or submerge it.
- **High impact activities** – some activities can put extra force on your artificial limb. Talk to your clinician if you plan to take part in activities with **unusually high impact**.
- **Chemicals** – some chemicals can damage your artificial limb or affect how its materials work.
- **Extreme heat or sunlight** – high temperatures and strong sunlight can affect some of the materials of your artificial limb.

Your clinician will talk with you about these considerations and check your artificial limb is suitable for your needs and activities.

Carrying heavy loads

The components in your artificial limb are designed to support a certain amount of weight. **Tell your prosthetist** if you plan to carry heavy loads while using your artificial limb.

Care and maintenance

The socket

Clean the inside of your socket **every day** to stop bacteria from building up. You may need to clean it more often in hot weather. Clean it with a sponge or soft cloth and mild soap. Use a soft brush, such as an old toothbrush, to clean hard to reach areas. Leave the socket overnight to completely dry.

Clean the outside in the same way when needed.

Do not put anything inside the socket, such as talcum powder or packing material unless instructed to do so by your clinician.

Do not physically modify or adjust your prosthesis in any way. If the socket fit changes or you are having trouble with your prosthesis in any way, contact your clinician. They will make the appropriate adjustments for you.

Check socket

A check socket is a temporary socket used to make sure your artificial limb fits properly before your final socket is made. It is not as strong as your final socket, so it can crack or break.

Do not use your artificial limb if you see a crack in the socket or hear cracking noises. Contact your prosthetist as soon as possible so they can check it.

All check sockets have been reinforced so they can be used safely outside the clinic while your fit is being assessed.

Valves in a suction socket

Keep the valve and the opening of the socket clean. Use a soft brush to remove any powder, dirt, or other build up that could stop the valve from working properly.

Make sure the valve is **firmly attached** to the socket. If your valve has a button, it should press and release smoothly.

If the valve is loose, damaged, or not working properly, contact your prosthetist.

Limb socks

Limb socks help protect your skin, improve the fit of your socket and, in some cases, absorb sweat. If you use a silicone gel or liner, wear your sock **over the liner**, not underneath it. A sheath can be worn **under the liner** to help absorb sweat and reduce skin stretching if this is a problem.

If you wear limb socks, **change them every day**, or more often if needed. You may need to add or remove them during the day to help your artificial limb fit properly. If your artificial limb is comfortable and is not rubbing your skin, you can add socks as needed.

Wash limb socks gently with mild soap (not detergent) and water. Rinse well.

Silicone socks/liners

Avoid contact with ballpoint pens, newsprint, vegetable dyes, etc., which will leave a permanent stain. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning (this differs between manufacturers).

Check with our team how to put your liner on correctly.

If you are wearing a liner or sleeve, **make sure it fits firmly**. This helps stop your artificial limb from moving up and down on your residual limb. This movement is called 'pistoning' and can rub your skin and cause sores.

Use mild soap and a damp cloth to wipe the sleeve or liner to keep it clean. Wash off all soap and leave to dry overnight.

If you wear a liner with a pin locking system, check that the pin is **firmly attached**. If it is loose, contact your prosthetist.

Some types of socket or liners can make your residual limb sweat more, especially in summer. For most people, this gets better **after about three months** of wearing an artificial limb. Using an antiperspirant may help reduce sweating.

Check your liner and any attachment points regularly for signs of wear and tear. If they look worn or damaged, contact your prosthetist.

Straps and harness

Keep straps clean and dry. Use saddle soap to clean any leather parts. Wash straps with soap and warm water.

Check your straps and harness regularly for signs of wear and tear (e.g. loose stitching). Contact your prosthetist if they look worn.

Checking the fit

Socket fit

Check your skin before and after wearing your artificial limb. **Red or pink marks on your skin should fade within 10 to 15 minutes**. **Do not** put your artificial limb on again until any red marks have gone.

If the marks do not fade, or if you get new marks over bony areas, check the fit of your artificial limb and change the number of socks. If the problem does not go away, stop using your artificial limb and contact your prosthetist for a review **within 48 hours**.

Changes in your body weight will change the fit of your artificial limb. If you lose or gain a lot of weight, **report this immediately** to your prosthetist, clinic or medical practitioner.

Limb socks

Ensure the sock **fits snugly, without wrinkles.**

Using your artificial limb

Storage

If your artificial limb has a hydraulic knee joint, **always store it in an upright position**.

Footwear

An artificial lower limb should be worn **with footwear**, unless directed by your prosthetist.

Before your artificial limb is made, your prosthetist will talk with you about the types of shoes you usually wear.

How long will my artificial limb last?

This will depend on things like your age, how active you are, and whether you are still growing. It may last from several months to several years.

In the early stages after amputation, your residual limb changes shape as it heals. This can affect how your artificial limb fits and make it uncomfortable. Your prosthetist may need to adjust the socket, add liners or socks, or make you a new socket.

Later on, increased activity or the need for more function may mean you need a different artificial limb, or new parts.

After your artificial limb has been fitted and you have completed your training phase, your artificial limb should only need minor repairs or maintenance. On average, it should last about three years.

Do not try to repair your artificial limb yourself. If you have any questions about how it fits or how it is working, contact your prosthetist.

For more helpful resources, please visit our website: www.pw.co.nz/resources.

Wear and tear signs

Wear and tear can cause discomfort around your residual limb and may damage parts of your artificial limb. If you notice anything unusual or have concerns, contact your prosthetist or rehab team leader for a check.

Look out for these signs of wear and tear on your artificial limb:

Example of delamination at the distal end.

Example of foot heel rubber failure.

Example of artificial limb used for a purpose it was not made for, e.g. using foot as a hammer.

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