Stages of Amputation and Rehabilitation

The process of amputation through rehabilitation can be broken down into stages. A basic pre-operative and post-operative plan might look something like this:

**Stage 1. Preoperative Stage:**

- During this stage, if your amputation is scheduled (not an emergency related to trauma) you will have a medical and physical assessment and receive some education from your surgeon on the procedure.
- Your surgeon might discuss planned pain management, the possibility of phantom pain and some goals for your short and long term future.
- If possible, you should try to meet with a peer visitor (someone who has experienced amputation and who is fully rehabilitated and enjoying everyday activities again). Studies show that peer visitation helps improve patient outcomes and attitudes. Many surgeons can recommend peer visitors to you and your family, or you can call 1-844-AMPOWER to find a peer visitor near you or request a visit through our site at: [http://www.hangerclinic.com/new-patient/ampower/Pages/AMPOWER-Peer-Visitor-Request-Form.aspx](http://www.hangerclinic.com/new-patient/ampower/Pages/AMPOWER-Peer-Visitor-Request-Form.aspx)
- This is also a good time to meet with a prosthetist (along with your surgeon, if possible) to discuss limb length and the optimum conditions to be able to have success with a prosthesis.

**Stage 2. Amputation Surgery and Acute Post-Operative Care:**

- During this stage, you will be admitted to the hospital for the surgery, which involves the removal of the limb and the closure of the wound.
- Your care team will apply a dressing to your limb to keep it protected and work to control your pain and discomfort.
- Your pain level will vary, depending on whether you had pain prior to surgery. Some people who had a lot of pain prior to surgery note feeling less pain after the surgery.
- The pain should lessen over time and often, by day 10, many people are on oral pain medications.
- There are a variety of dressing options available for protecting the wound from and ace bandage wrap to a customized removable rigid dressing (RRD).
- In some instances, you may awake from surgery wearing and IPOP or an Immediate Post-Operative Prosthesis. Find out, ahead of time, if you will be fit with a bandage, and RRD or and IPOP.
- Your length of stay in the hospital depends on the nature of the amputation. Usually, patients are release from acute care between 3-10 days post-op. During this time, your care team is focusing on maintaining / improving your
range of motion in the affected limb, promoting wound healing, teaching you some functional mobility exercises, and providing ongoing education and support.

- If you have any questions / concerns, now is the time to speak up. Consider keeping a journal when questions pop into your mind and try to have a family member or friend present when receiving instructions or information from your care providers.
- Use caution to keep a clean and sterile environment and ask visiting friends and family to wash their hands upon entering your room. You do not want to risk infection.
- After you’ve gained your strength, balance and appetite, you may be released home, to a skilled nursing facility, or to a rehabilitation facility.
- While recovering, now is a good time to jump online and do some research. There are many valuable sites to check out that will assist you in your journey. One such site is the private-password protected social networking community for amputees, family members and care providers at www.EmpoweringAmputees.org. There are thousands of members in the site who have shared similar experiences and are offering tips and trick to new amputees and their families. There are groups to join, discussion forums, blogs, videos and more. While you have some recovery time, connect with others who have been through what you’re going through to receive hope, support and comfort in knowing you are not alone.

**Stage 3. Pre-prosthetic Training:**

- During this phase, your care team will be focused on preparing your residual limb for a prosthesis. This will involve education in skin care, muscle strength, pain reduction / management and limb shaping.
- Often, patients experience swelling in the residual limb, so you will probably be required to wear a shrinker or compression sock to control the swelling.
- You will be working with your rehabilitative care team and physical therapist to avoid contractures (muscle tightening) and gain strength. These exercises can take place in a skilled nursing facility or rehab center, or from your home, depending on the care plan established by your care coordinators.
- Part of the focus of pre-prosthetic training is desensitizing your residual limb and scar. There are a number of techniques that you can do on your own to start to prepare your limb for a prosthesis. These include massage, tapping, rubbing the end of your limb in a circular motion.
- During this stage, you may want to meet with your prosthetist to have him/her evaluate your limb for readiness. It’s also a good idea to stay in touch with a peer mentor who can answer your questions. You’ll want to
know as much as possible about your options going into your prosthetic evaluation appointment.

**Stage 4. Prosthetic Prescription and Fabrication:**

- When you meet with your clinician after you have completely healed from your surgery, he/she will ask you a number of questions about your goals, your vocation and your hobbies. This will help him/her identify the most effective components for your prosthesis.
- Take this opportunity to learn as much as you can about options. Often, patients can get an idea of what they want in their heads, only to find out that the option they think they want would not provide optimal function to achieve their goals. Remember, high tech and expensive doesn’t equate to the best on the market. What’s best for you, the individual, will be determined through open communications with your clinician and care providers.
- There are pros and cons to all different device systems and it’s important to keep an open mind as you and your clinician decide what’s right for you.
- This would be a great time to meet with other individuals who wear different technologies to understand their benefits and limitations.
- Once a plan is in place, your clinician will begin the process of building your socket. There are a variety of ways to create a socket and your clinician will share with you how he/she achieves the best fit.
- When your “check socket” is ready, you’ll be back in your clinician’s office to test the first socket. During this appointment, it is critical that you communicate and discomfort or pain in the socket. This is trial time, so it’s your time to make adjustments and modifications before your definitive prosthesis is fabricated.
- Take your time and get it right! Many people want to rush this process in order to get back to their lives. Understand that this can be a lengthy process, but you want to make sure you have it just right. This will ensure your greatest chances of success.
- Even with a great fitting prosthesis, you may experience continued shrinking of the residual limb. This is normal and modifications can be made to improve the fit while your limb changes size.
Stage 5. Delivery of Prosthesis and Community Integration:

- Once you receive your prosthesis from your clinician, he/she will provide you with a wearing schedule to gradually get you accustomed to wearing your prosthesis.
- You will continue with physical therapy (for lower extremity amputees) or occupational therapy (for upper extremity amputees) until you feel that you are ready to go it alone.
- As time goes on, wearing a prosthesis and integrating into your old patterns will become second nature. It can be frustrating and challenging the first year, but your hard work and dedication will pay off when you have returned to living the life you love.
- You will need to return to see your prosthetist from time to time for modifications and adjustments that first year. Your relationship with your prosthetist is an important relationship in your life. Stay in touch and do not hesitate to call for any questions / concerns.
- Know that though you are back on your feet, you still may periodically experience grief over your loss. This is normal and it’s a good idea to stay connected to peer support through a mentor or through the web community in order to work through these feelings.
- When you have fully recovered and rehabilitated from your amputation, consider becoming a peer mentor to others, as it helps others starting out on the journey tremendously, AND it shows you how far you’ve come.