

Doing Things Differently



Amputees and individuals with limb impairments have pretty much the same options as non disabled people when it comes to taking part in sport, physical activity and exercise, but be prepared to modify an activity or exercise to enable you to take part.

I don't know what to do?

Have a think about what you hope to get out of exercise, what you're able to do and when you're able to do it. If you want to meet people as well as get fit, a team sport or joining a club might be best. If you're stuck for time, something that you can fit more easily into the day like walking or exercising at home or the gym near work might be better. Think about what you like doing. Different sports have different requirements – speed for sprinting, strength for rugby, hand-eye coordination for badminton, ball skills for football.

Or take up something you've never tried before – horse-riding, abseiling, skiing or one of the sports specially devised for disabled people. Think broadly. It's not just the traditional sports that will get you fit. What about yoga, gardening or dancing?

I can't afford to go to the gym or join a club?

You don't have to go to a gym or sports centre. There are many exercises you can do at home with no or cheap equipment. There is a lot of satisfaction in simply doing one more repetition of a morning exercise than you did the day before. Also think about how fit you are right now. Some

activities are more physically demanding than others. Don't start off with tennis or squash if you're very unfit. Start with a lower impact activity. Have a look at **LimbPower's ABC's Toolkit** funded by Sport England, for exercises you can do in your own home. www.limbpower.com

Walking

Walking is the most popular physical activity in the world, it is inexpensive, accessible and rarely associated with injury in non disabled walkers. Walking is an important form of exercise for amputees and individuals with limb impairments who are able to ambulate as the health benefits are huge. Walking strengthens your heart, reduces the risk of disease, helps with weight management, it strengthens the bones, tones muscles and is linked to increased happiness. The physiotherapist at your Limb centre will have worked with you on getting the basics right before you are discharged. **If you are having problems walking you can go back and visit the physiotherapist at the limb centre, you don't need to be a new amputee to access the physiotherapy service at your limb centre.** If your problems with walking are socket related then visit your prosthetist to explain what the problem is and ask for help. You can also read **Accessing Sport and Physical Activity – Practical tips** for some short term suggestions. LimbPower run an event called the Advanced Rehab Event aimed at taking your walking and prosthetic limb management to the next level. Contact LimbPower to find out more about this event.

Cycling

Cycling is popular among lower limb amputees because it is non-weight bearing. Like walking it is an effective mode of transport that gets you fitter at the same time and for amputees is sometimes easier than walking. There are tricycles, quad cycles, recumbants and other alternatives for those unable to ride a regular bicycle including hand-powered bikes called hand cycles. There are also power-assisted bicycles and static exercise bikes for using at home. Side-by-sides or tandems allow two to ride at once.

Running bikes are half-way between running and walking. They are three-wheeled tricycles with no pedals which support you as you walk or run. **See LimbPower's five steps to cycling for more information on getting back on a bike.**

Running

If you can run it is an excellent way of keeping fit. For below knee amputees there are a number of feet available on the NHS which are suitable for running. For above knee amputees the choice is more limited and you need to decide whether to run with or without a knee joint. It is incredibly difficult to access a running leg via the NHS, but if you can prove a need it can be done. **See LimbPower's five steps to running for more information on learning to run as an amputee.**

Before considering whether you need a running blade you need to be trained to run on your every day leg as a first port of call, rather than learning how to run on a blade.



Exercise – at the gym or at home

Just 10 minutes a day exercise will help. Talk to your rehabilitation physiotherapist, who can provide you with an exercise programme. You can also get personalised advice at a good gym (there are 400 IFI accredited gyms, with trained staff) but if you want to work out at home, that's fine too. LimbPower have a factsheet on exercises, which will help you with your agility, balance, co-ordination, strength, conditioning and range of motion, designed to improve your interaction with your prosthesis. Please visit the toolkit section of the LimbPower website to access this. Get advice first, especially if you have a physical impairment – exercises that are not suited to your impairment may be dangerous. **See LimbPower's ABC's Toolkit for suitable exercises for your level of amputation.** The Upper Limb Version will be coming soon.

Swimming

Swimming is a great sport and among the safest ways to exercise as your body is supported up to 90% by the water. Also because water is about 12 times as thick as the air, the water resistance maximises the benefit you get from your movements. This means that swimming is a little like jogging and lifting weights at the same time. Plus, of course, your body is submerged making it a less public form of exercise than some others. There are many instructors who are used to teaching disabled people to swim and many clubs and county swimming set-ups have a disability liaison officer. Contact

your local pool to see what is available in your area. The Big Splash section of the British swimming website – www.swimming.org/bigsplash

Most amputees don't swim wearing their prosthesis, but it is sometimes possible to get a water activity limb for wearing pool side if that is required.

Adapted sports

The majority of sports can be played by below knee amputees on the same basis as non-disabled people. Some sports have been adapted to make them more disability-friendly, such as sitting volleyball, football, wheelchair basketball, which might be more suitable for above-knee amputees and wheelchair users. Adaptations for disabled players also appear in cricket (www.ecb.co.uk/development/disability-cricket) – the England and Wales Cricket Board has opportunities for blind, deaf, physically and intellectually disabled players – and tennis (www.tennisfoundation.org.uk/disabilitytennis).

Overcoming the psychological barriers is the critical first step. Amputees of all ages and all abilities do participate in physical activity and sport. At the recent LimbPower Games we had over 20 sports. Sport England fund 42 key sports, all with provisions for disabled people. Some are much more advanced in their programmes than others, but all offer some level of participation for disabled people. You can go to the Parasport website and type in your level of amputation and it will calculate a list of suitable sports for your level of amputation. You can also use the website

to find local clubs. parasport.org.uk/find-a-sport.

There is a misconception among amputees that the majority of disability sports are wheelchair based. Of the 22 sports Parasport recommended for a single leg amputee only six were wheelchair based. There is also a common misconception that an amputee needs a bespoke prosthesis to participate in sport. There are many sports where a prosthesis either isn't needed or an everyday leg is sufficient, socket comfort permitting. There are of course exceptions for example an above knee amputee will need specific components to be able to run. There are knees on the market that are suitable for walking and can be adjusted by the amputee (if the prosthetist is happy for them to do so) to make running easier. There are lots of feet that are suitable for running. It is best to discuss this with your rehabilitation consultant and prosthetist. Upper limb amputee may need a bicycle adjustment to be able to cycle, but there are many sports which can be enjoyed without a bespoke prosthesis such as swimming, archery shooting, sitting volleyball, wheelchair basketball, rowing, canoeing, sailing, powerlifting, fencing, badminton tennis and table tennis to name but a few.

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