
Understanding Leg Amputation: Surgery After Injury

Leg amputation is a surgery to remove part or all of your leg. It is done because tissue in the leg is very damaged and can't be healed. Your health care provider and team will work with you to set up a treatment plan. Take an active role in your care and ask questions.

Why amputation is needed

The health care provider has determined that your body can't heal the severe injury to your leg. They may have already tried to save your damaged limb. In some cases, the damage from the injury is too severe. Then, the surgery is done right away. The purpose of the surgery is to restore your ability to function. Removing the damaged part of your leg can improve your total health. The injury may include damage to bones, nerves, and blood vessels. Some common causes of severe injuries are:

- Car or motorcycle accidents.
- Farm accidents.
- War injuries.
- Industrial injuries.
- Falls.

About the surgery

The surgeon will save as much of your limb as possible. This may include joints, such as the knee. But the surgeon may not know before the surgery how much of the leg will remain. In some cases, another surgery is needed later to remove more of the leg. Or more than one surgery may be planned to safely complete the amputation and close the wound. This is done to preserve your health and improve healing.

Questions to ask

Ask your care team about anything that isn't clear to you. Here are examples of questions to ask:

- How will my pain be managed?
- How soon will I be able to stand after surgery?
- Will I get a prosthesis?
- Where can I find support after my amputation?
- When will I start therapy after surgery?

After the surgery

Right after surgery, you'll have a splint or other form of dressing on your leg. This helps control swelling and aid healing. You may start rehabilitation, including physical therapy, soon after surgery, depending on your health. You'll also learn how to safely transfer between your bed and other surfaces, such as a chair. This helps prevent falls and protects your wound while it heals. When you're ready, you may be able to move around using a walker or crutches. And when your wound has healed, you may be able to be fitted for an artificial limb. But this may take some time. The swelling in your leg must go down for the prosthesis to fit well.

Pain management

When you wake up right after surgery, you'll be on pain medicine to help keep you comfortable. Your pain will be checked at all stages of your recovery. Talk to your care team about choices for medicine and other treatments to help manage your pain.

Rehab

The goal of rehabilitation (rehab) is to help you reach your best level of health and quality of life. It is done to support your independence in walking and daily activities. Physical therapy makes your muscles stronger and helps to prevent muscles or joints from getting tighter. You will have a rehab team that may include doctors, therapists, prosthetists, surgeons, nurses, and others involved in your care. You are the most important member of this team.

Living with limb loss

Losing a limb is life changing. It's normal to feel upset, sad, scared, angry, or even relieved after surgery. You'll likely have a lot of questions or concerns about your future. You may wish to talk to an expert on emotional changes, such as a psychologist. Keep in mind that the goal of this surgery is to restore your function. This is so your health can improve and you can live your life more fully. See below for where you can find extra support.

Notes for family and friends

When someone you care about has an amputation, it may come as a shock. You may wonder if your loved one will be able to care for themselves. You may not know how to react to the changes to their body. These are normal concerns. It will take time for the whole family to adjust. Keep in mind that limb loss does not change who a person is.

Right now, your loved one will need your full support. Take an active role in their care. Help to collect and remember information, such as medicines and health care appointments. Most of all, your family member or friend needs your understanding and patience. Don't forget to listen. Let them tell you what kind of support is needed. To learn more about adjusting to limb loss, see below.

To learn more

To learn more about limb loss and to connect with support groups, contact [Amputee Coalition at www.amputee-coalition.org](http://www.amputee-coalition.org).