

Skin Care Guide for Amputees

Care Keeps Skin Healthy

The body's best protection against infection and disease is its largest organ, the skin.

For those who wear a prosthesis, consistent care thorough hygiene is especially important as it helps prevent disabling skin conditions and fosters a normal, active life.

Because the residual limb is in the socket's airless chamber throughout the day, the leg does not experience normal heat loss and retention patterns. Without air circulation, accumulated heat and trapped perspiration could encourage fungal development and bacterial growth.

A combination of regular cleansing and the use of surgical scrub solutions will provide the skin the protection it needs to stay healthy.

Clean skin is basic

A daily cleansing of the residual limb should become as routine and second nature as brushing your teeth. Cleansing is best done at day's end, when the prosthesis will be removed for several hours, since damp skin inserted in a socket is more likely to swell and become irritated.

Thoroughly wash the skin with warm water and soap. Fully rinse the limb in warm water, since any remaining soap film contributes to skin irritation. Then towel dry gently, but completely.

After drying, it is advisable to apply a medicated skin lotion or cream to the entire stump area. Supple skin can better withstand the extensive pressures exerted by a prosthesis and diminish the formation of calluses and abrasions.

Maintain socket hygiene

Just as it's important to keep skin clean and supple, it's equally important to wash the prosthetic socket regularly before going to bed. Using soap and warm water, thoroughly wet, lather, scrub, and rinse the entire surface of the socket. In appliances with a valve, force soapy water into and around the area of the valve, rinsing well with warm, clean water. The socket should be completely dried with absorbent towels and allowed to ventilate overnight. Make sure the socket is absolutely dry before wearing since dampness may cause the skin to stick, rub, and become irritated.

Care of prosthetic socks

Changing the prosthetic sock(s) daily is vital to skin health and hygiene. After machine or hand washing in a mild detergent, excess water should be squeezed, not wrung, from the sock to help maintain its shape.

If a prosthetic sock should dry in a distorted manner, insert a tennis ball to reshape it.

Sheath needs washing too

The prosthetic sheath is an interface between the skin and the prosthetic sock. It should be changed and laundered daily.

If skin problems arise

Closely monitor the appearance of skin and, if a sore or abnormal condition develops, notify your physician without delay to prevent a minor problem from becoming a disabling situation.

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