



**Moving Medicine**

**Oxford Prosthetics  
Service**

**Physical Activity  
Following an Amputation**

**Information for patients**

Undergoing an amputation is a life changing event and everyday tasks that were once taken for granted may present a challenge. Physical activity has a range of benefits, and we encourage all amputees to try to live a physically active life. This booklet has been developed to provide you with information regarding physical activity following an amputation.

## **What are the benefits of being active?**

Being physically active can:

- Improve the health of your heart and lungs
- Help you manage your weight
- Reduce the risk of developing medical problems, such as high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes
- Improve your mood, reduce stress and improve sleep
- Help you maintain your independence
- Make everyday tasks more achievable
- Provide opportunities to spend time with friends and family or to meet new people

## **Every Activity Counts: What is physical activity and what counts as moderate?**

Anything that makes you breathe faster whilst still being able to hold a conversation is classed as moderate activity. Many activities can easily be done at home, they don't have to be strenuous or need a gym. Every activity counts and could include:

- A home exercise programme
- Housework or gardening
- Arm cycling
- Propelling your wheelchair, or dedicated walking if you have a prosthetic leg
- Swimming
- Attending an exercise class

## How much activity should I be doing?

You should aim to do at least 150 minutes of moderate activity every week. This may initially seem like a lot, but it is important to remember:

Even a small increase in the amount of activity you do can make a big difference to your health.

Doing something is better than doing nothing, so start slowly and build up gradually over many weeks or months, ultimately aiming for 150 minutes per week.

Every activity counts

By breaking up activity into 10-minute bouts throughout the day you will soon find that it builds up during the week. You may start with one 10-minute bout of activity three times a week, gradually building up how long you're active for and how often you do it. Some days you'll have a bit more time than others, so you can plan your activity around your week.

## Not active? Start gradually

### I'm new to physical activity. How should I start?

It's never too late to start being more physically active, but if you're new to activity then strenuous exercises are less suitable to begin with. Try starting slowly and building up gradually in bouts as little as 10-minutes. Find something that you enjoy or that you can do with family or friends, as this will help you stick with it. Try to build physical activity into your daily routine. As you begin to find it easier to be active, try to go a little further and enjoy your activity for longer. Some ideas that may be suitable for you include:

- Going to your local shops using your wheelchair or walking fast
- Taking your children or grandchildren to school or to the park
- Swimming
- Joining an exercise class

**It is never too late to start!**

## Already active? Keep going

If you were active before having your amputation you should try to maintain your physical activity levels. As an amputee there are a huge number of activities that you can continue to do, but some may have to be adapted or changed.

## Remember to find something you enjoy

### Listen to your body and adapt

Whatever you chose, you'll need to listen to your body and may need to adapt the activities you do. You may find that some activities aren't for you, but don't let this put you off. Learn to find activities that work for you and that you enjoy.

### What should I avoid?

If you were previously sedentary then you should start slowly, build up gradually and avoid suddenly starting vigorous activity. This is because some people may have undiagnosed cardiovascular disease, and the sudden change may increase the risk of a heart attack.

If you have symptoms such as chest pain, breathlessness, palpitations, dizziness or light headedness you should consult your GP before undertaking regular physical activity. This is because these symptoms may be signs of underlying heart or lung disease, and it is important for these to be looked in to.

You should avoid doing anything that puts you at risk of falling. Following your amputation, you may require need additional support that you didn't need before. Performing certain stretching or balance dependant activities may increase your risk of falling and further injury if you do them alone or without the necessary support.

### Do I need any special equipment?

No, but it is important to stay cool. Wear loose, comfortable clothing and keep well hydrated, so remember to carry water with you. If you are attending an exercise class ensure that your instructor knows that you've had an amputation as they will be able to tailor the class to your needs.

## When should I stop exercising?

If an activity is uncomfortable, slow down or take a break and see if you feel better. If you don't, stop the activity and seek medical advice. This is especially important if you have shortness of breath, chest pain, severe headaches, dizziness or light headedness. If you're having difficulty due to your prosthesis or remnant limb, speak to your prosthetist for advice. It is not uncommon for people to develop changes in posture and a muscular imbalance following an amputation, so speak to your physiotherapist for advice if this causes problems.

If you have any medical conditions or develop new problems in the future you should check with your doctor or GP that it's safe for you to continue your current activities. However, light/moderate intensity activity is recommended for most medical conditions.

**If it feels good keep going – if it is uncomfortable stop and seek advice.**

## How to keep motivated

Having the motivation to be active following an amputation can be a challenge.

Here are some tips:

- Find something that you enjoy. Your local council is a great source of information and has a range of activities available. Visit their website to find out more.  
<https://www.activeoxfordshire.org/health-conditions-disabilities>
- Find an activity that you can do with friends or family
- Make physical activity part of your daily routine
- Set yourself some goals and try to work towards them

## Further information

### Here for Health

Oxford University Hospital drop-in centre for advice and support on healthy living, including physical activity, diet, smoking, alcohol and emotional wellbeing.

Tel: 01865 221 429 (Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 5.00pm)

Email: [hereforhealth@ouh.nhs.uk](mailto:hereforhealth@ouh.nhs.uk)

Website: [www.ouh.nhs.uk/HereforHealth](http://www.ouh.nhs.uk/HereforHealth)



### Limb Power

National charity that aims to engage amputees and individuals with limb impairments in physical activity, sport and the arts to improve quality of life.

Tel: 07502 276858

Email: [info@limbpower.com](mailto:info@limbpower.com)

Website: [www.limbpower.com](http://www.limbpower.com)





# Physical Activity for Disabled Adults

Make it a daily habit



Do strength and balance activities on at least two days per week

For substantial health gains aim for at least 150 minutes each week of moderate intensity activity

Remember the talk test:



Can talk, but not sing = moderate intensity activity

Difficulty talking without pausing = vigorous intensity activity

