

QUEENSLAND AMPUTEE AWARENESS DAY—11 JUNE

# Recovering from Limb Loss

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## Pain after the operation

Some pain in an area of a wound is common after an operation as the tissues start to heal. This usually improves over the first few weeks and usually requires some pain medication until the wound is healed.

Increasing pain following the surgery can indicate a problem such as an infection or fluid build up and you should let your surgeon know if your pain is not settling.

## Stump pain

Some people get persisting pain in the stump even after the wound has healed. The nerves in this area have been cut and the scar can become sensitive.

It is usual to try local measures such as an elastic stocking, massage, vibration and pain creams to try and help this type of pain.

Persistent pain in the wound can be due to a number of conditions and you should ask your doctor to review the wound and check for problems.

## Phantom pain

Most people experience the sensation of a phantom limb after amputation. This is not imaginary and the sensation is not a sign that something is wrong with you. In some people the phantom may be painful and cause shooting pains or persisting deep nerve pain like an ache. Sometimes this pain is like the pain you may have had in the limb before the operation. This type of pain can be difficult to treat and may need strong pain killers or drugs which work on the nervous system such as drugs used for epilepsy or depression.

## Managing pain after amputation

Managing stress and learning relaxation techniques are important in all people suffering pain.

### Physical treatments:

- Ensure the prosthesis is fitting well
- Use of a shrinker sock may help in pain control
- Massage and exercises
- Creams
- Vibration

### Medications:

- Simple measures such as paracetamol (panamax, panadol) taken regularly
- Stronger pain measures such as anti-inflammatory drugs (brufen, naproxen)
- Morphine like drugs for severe pains
- Drugs for nerve pain such as drugs used for depression or epilepsy which work for severe nerve pain (eg amitriptyline, gabapentin)

## What should you do if your pain is not well controlled?

Let your doctor, nurse, physio and prosthetist know about your pain.

A pain diary is sometimes helpful to your doctor in working out how to best treat your pain.

Special clinics are available to help people with chronic pain and your doctor can refer you to a pain specialist if needed.