Caring for your prosthetic upper limb

The prosthetic limb is a mechanical device made up of various components and, therefore, requires regular maintenance. It is your responsibility as a prosthetic user to keep the prosthetic socket and liner free from dirt, fluff or dust.

Regularly check the prosthesis for signs of wear and tear. If there are any unusual signs (visible, audible or functional), contact your prosthetist for maintenance or repair. DO NOT adjust screws, bolts, hinges or other parts of the prosthesis yourself.

The prosthesis should be reviewed every six months or earlier if there are problems with the fit or function.

Normal use

The prosthesis is designed to assist your activities of daily living. Please take care in cases of extreme heat (above 70°C) and in chemical environments. Avoid sand and water if using a myoelectric prosthesis.

The Socket

Daily cleaning of the interior of the socket is required to prevent microbial bacteria build-up. This may be required more frequently in warm weather.

Clean with a sponge or soft cloth and a little mild soap. Inaccessible points can be reached with a soft brush (e.g. an old toothbrush). Use a damp soft cloth on myoelectric sockets and wipe dry. Leave to dry thoroughly overnight and clean the exterior in a similar way when necessary.

DO NOT add any foreign material into the socket (e.g. talc, packing material).

Limb socks

If you use limb socks, they should be changed daily and hand-washed with mild soap (not detergent) and water. Rinse well. Ensure the sock fits snugly, without wrinkles.

Silicone socks and liners

Avoid contact with ball point pens, newsprint, vegetable dyes, etc, which will leave a permanent stain. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning (this differs between manufacturers). Regularly inspect the liner and any attachment points for signs of wear and tear. See your prosthetist if the attachment looks worn.

Straps and harness

Keep leather parts clean and dry, using saddle soap for cleaning. The harness should be washed weekly. Ask your occupational therapist or prosthetist to show you how to disconnect the harness for washing and reconnect it in exactly the right places. Wash by hand or in the washing machine with mild soap and water.

Checking the Fit

Check the skin prior to and following use of the prosthesis. Areas of pressure (red or pink marks) should disappear after 10 to 15 minutes. If they do not dissipate within a reasonable time or if new marks develop
over bony areas, check the fit of the prosthesis and contact your amputee clinic, medical practitioner, occupational therapist or prosthetist for a review if problems persist.

Signs that your prosthesis may be ill-fitting include inability to control the elbow joint or terminal device, or inability to get good myosites.

**Maintenance**

**Split Hooks** – Apply an occasional drop of very light machine oil on the hinged bearing of the hook. Any sign of wear should be reported to your prosthetist or occupational therapist. Carry spare rubber bands in case of breakage and renew perished bands using a band applicator. Ask your clinic for a script for these items. Keep abrasive materials away from moving parts.

**Cosmetic gloves** – Wash the outer glove with mild soap and water. These gloves are easily stained so avoid contact with ball-point pens, dark fabrics, newsprint, lipstick, etc. Refer to manufacturer’s instructions for cleaning the glove, as instructions differ between silicone and PVC gloves. Inspect gloves regularly for tears which may let water into the terminal device.

**Cable** – Report to your prosthetist for replacement if the cable is worn, bent or frayed.

**Storage** – Do not hang the prosthesis by the cable or harness. Store cables flat, not coiled or curved. Remove batteries when not in use.

**Clothing** – A t-shirt or singlet should be worn under the harness to protect the skin from chafing.

**Myoelectric arms** – Patients with myoelectric arms must take care of the electrodes by cleaning the inside of the socket daily with a damp cloth – or more frequently on hot days. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions regarding care of the battery.

Ask your prosthetist for any manufacturer’s instructions related to your prosthesis.

**Do not attempt to repair your prosthesis yourself.**

If you have any questions about your prosthesis please contact your prosthetist or occupational therapist.

For more information:

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