



Back Pain

Back pain can occur for many reasons – injury, improper posture, or weakness of certain muscles. It can occur suddenly due to unusual stress or injury, or it can be cumulative, resulting from small stresses over a long period of time. Living with an amputation can exacerbate existing back problems or bring on new ones.

Considerations for Amputees

Amputees are more prone to back pain than the general population. For a leg amputee, using an artificial leg and/or adjusting their gait (walking) pattern to compensate for the missing limb can increase strain on their residual limb and other parts of the body, such as the trunk and back. Leg amputees with high-level amputations usually have more dramatic gait deviations (e.g., limping) that can place additional stress on their backs.

Arm amputees can also suffer from back pain as a missing limb creates a significant weight imbalance. Without a balance of weight on both sides of the spine, you may develop scoliosis and other overuse injuries. A proper prosthesis can remedy this by providing added weight and length to encourage realignment.

Back pain may not indicate a problem with your prosthetic fitting; your overall lifestyle is also a factor to consider. For leg amputees, back pain may be caused by the frequency of walking with gait issues. Arm amputees may experience back pain due to poor posture or from performing certain activities. By taking a proactive and multi-faceted approach in consultation with their health-care providers, amputees can alleviate the stresses that can cause back pain.

Ways to Relieve and Prevent Back Pain

There are a range of strategies to help amputees counteract and/or prevent back pain. A good place to start is talking with your prosthetist, who can pay close attention to factors such as the component selection, alignment, suspension, and



socket fit of your artificial limb. If you are a leg amputee, your prosthetist can also tell you if you may benefit from gait training.

Making lifestyle changes can also reduce your risk of back issues. If you are a leg amputee, try finding ways to shorten your walking routes or use an elevator instead of stairs. For arm amputees, wearing your artificial limb and/or using daily living aids for everyday tasks can help maintain proper alignment and reduce the strain on your back.

If you usually carry a backpack, consider purchasing one with a waist strap or one with wheels and an extendable handle. Post-secondary students may also want to rent an on-campus locker to store heavy belongings like textbooks. Many textbooks are also available in a digital format.

Exercise

Regular exercise can improve overall health and prosthetic function for amputees. A simple exercise routine can help strengthen back muscles to support the use of an artificial limb. Amputees also use more oxygen, and thus more energy, to function compared to someone without an amputation. Exercise can help with this by increasing overall energy levels.

Discuss any back problems with your doctor or clinic team. They can help you devise a custom exercise routine to match your abilities and needs. Should you choose to consult with a personal trainer, some companies have trainers who are experienced in working with people with disabilities. Rehabilitation centres may also offer full fitness programs with advanced gait training.

Your fitness routine may work best for you in a gym setting where a variety of equipment is available. However, many simple exercises can be done at home at little to no cost.

Simple Back-Strengthening Exercises

Bridge



Lie on your back with your knees raised and feet on the floor. Raise your pelvis and lower back, holding for a few seconds. Once you have practised this exercise for a while, you can place light weights onto your stomach if you would like to increase the intensity.

Plank



Lie on your stomach and raise yourself up on your forearms and the tips of your toes. Hold your body straight for as long as you can. Start out with three of these in a workout. You may also practice this with the knees down to start.

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