



Physical Activity Following an Amputation

The importance of physical activity in attaining and maintaining good health have been well established, but did you know physical activity is even more important if you have experienced a limb amputation? Physical activity post-amputation provides all of the traditional benefits, plus additional physical and psychological advantages.¹⁻⁵ Whether you are working with a physical therapist or personal trainer, or participating in a recreational sport, the important thing is to move and move safely! The table below outlines the benefits of physical activity and the significance of those benefits on your daily life.

Table 1. Benefits of Physical Activity¹⁻⁴

Benefit	Why it matters
Improved cardiopulmonary (heart and lung) function	Reduces risk for cardiovascular disease and diabetes; promotes endurance and lean body mass
Psychosocial benefits	Improves body image, acceptance of amputation, self-esteem, and overall quality of life
Improved core strength and flexibility	Better prosthetic gait and proper prosthetic use; improved balance; reduces overuse injuries and pain syndromes
Improved balance	Reduces the risk and fear of falling; increases ease of daily activities
Muscular strength	Slows muscle fatigue, potentially making activities of daily living easier; upper body strength assists with transferring (for example, from wheelchair to bed)

Getting started

Always start by talking to your healthcare team to determine general activity guidelines specific to where you are in your recovery process. Then, work on functional strength and movement to build a strong foundation. Functional exercises mimic movements made in everyday life, so you don't just strengthen individual muscles; you strengthen the core and teach the body to move correctly. A physical therapist or certified personal trainer who has knowledge regarding adaptive or inclusive fitness will be able to assist with creating and executing safe and effective exercises.

Finding the balance

One challenge some people encounter is finding the balance between being physically active and allowing for proper rest and energy conservation. Rest includes taking breaks in between activities, getting quality sleep and proper nutrition, and not extending your body beyond its current capabilities.⁶ Energy conservation relies on good planning and efficiency. For example, if doing laundry tends to tire you out, break it down into steps such as emptying the dryer, folding the



laundry, and putting it away, and rest in between each step. This is especially important if you have something later in the day that will require you to have energy left over, such as a physical therapy session or a family birthday celebration.⁷ Talking to your healthcare team to develop a strategy in advance will help strike this balance, but understanding and listening to your body is also crucial.

Learning more

Check out the resources below to learn more about the benefits of physical activity, and how you can incorporate stretching, strength training, and aerobic conditioning into your daily routine at any stage of recovery.

- Sailors and Coast Guardsmen can contact [Navy Wounded Warrior Safe Harbor](#) to learn more about their [Adaptive Athletic Reconditioning](#) program.
- Marines can check out the [Marine Corps Wounded Warrior Regiment Athlete Reconditioning Program](#).
- The [afterdeployment.mil](#) site offers a [booklet on recovering from a physical injury](#), including tips for staying active.
- The [Amputee Coalition](#) has a variety of [physical activity resources](#) for amputees, including exercise suggestions and testimonials.
- The [Wounded Warrior Project](#) offers [Physical Health and Wellness programs](#) designed to reduce stress, combat depression, and promote an overall healthy and active lifestyle by encouraging participation in fun, educational activities.



References

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