

# Fall information for amputees

Falls are very common among amputees like yourself, especially in the early stages of rehabilitation before you receive a prosthetic limb. Some research suggests that in the first year after amputation over half of amputees fall. This can have devastating effects on the residual limb (stump), your mobility and confidence.

## **Reasons for falling**

The reasons why you may fall are many and varied. Some of the common causes are described below:

### **Phantom sensations**

Many amputees experience Phantom sensations, that is, they feel they still have a limb where there is not one. You are particularly at risk of this at night, when drowsy, as you may wake up and attempt to stand and fall, forgetting you have had an amputation.

### **Balance**

It is likely that your balance will be affected by the loss of a limb, whether you wear a prosthesis or not. When not wearing a prosthesis you will not be able to correct your balance by putting your foot down.

When wearing a prosthesis you lose the normal sensation of your foot on the ground, therefore your balance is poor when standing or walking.

If you are on a drug called gabapentin, this may affect your balance. If you think this may be happening, please be extra careful when moving about, and speak to your doctor.

### **What to do if you fall - Don't panic!**

Take a few moments to regain your composure and calm down. If you are injured and feel you can't get up off the floor, then try to remember 4 things:

1. If you wear a pendant alarm or have a pull cord, use these to call for assistance.
2. Keep telephones on low surfaces. If you realise you are injured, do not hesitate to call for an ambulance.

3. Have blankets tucked in the corner of each room. Pull these around yourself to keep warm
4. Pull any cushions you have off sofas and chairs. Put them underneath you, so you are not sitting on a hard floor

If you feel you are well enough to try to get up, then do so as shown by your Physiotherapist. See the 'How to Get Up Off the Floor' Guide.

After you fall you should always check your residual limb (stump) for damage. If seriously injured, you may need to go to Accident and Emergency, or your GP. You should monitor your residual limb (stump) for a few days – it may take this long for problems to arise after the fall.

Many people feel embarrassed if they fall. Make sure you let your therapist or GP know, especially if you were dizzy before you fell, as there may be a medical reason for it. If you have any questions or concerns about falling please speak to your therapist.

## **Reasons for falling**

- **Diabetes**

Many amputees have diabetes, which can have a huge effect on eyesight and sensation (feeling) in legs. This can lead to falls, as hazards may not be seen and uneven surfaces may not be felt underfoot.

- **Muscle Weakness**

If you have been unwell for a long time, your muscles may have weakened. This can also affect your balance.

Exercises from your Physiotherapist will help. If you are unsure about which exercises to do, then ask your Physiotherapist for some advice.

- **Vascular Disease**

As with diabetes, people with vascular disease may have problems with sensation in their limbs, as the blood flow may be poor. This may lead to less awareness of surfaces underfoot and therefore increase the chances of falling.

- **Taking risks**

Sometimes, when people are 'transferring' from one place to another they may take risks, such as leaving too big a gap, or not putting the brakes on their wheelchair. Although at times there may be no problems from taking risks, it can lead to falls.

- **Environmental Factors**

Many amputees fall due to tripping or slipping in the home. Hazards such as rugs, cables, door thresholds, and magazines left lying on the floor, can get in the way. Also, poor arrangement of furniture can make transferring difficult and dangerous.

## Effects of Falling

### Wound problems

Especially in the early stages, a wound or partially healed residual limb (stump) can be very seriously damaged by a fall. This can have consequences such as delayed rehabilitation or even the need for a higher level of amputation.

### Mobility

Even if the residual limb (stump) is well healed, it may not be possible to wear your prosthesis for a period of time, due to pain and swelling. This may mean you need to use your wheelchair to get around.

### Confidence

It is quite normal that a fall can lead to anxiety about having another fall. However, anxiety can lead to avoidance of activities associated with the fall, such as walking. You may need the confidence boost of another person walking with you initially, to get your confidence back.

### How to Prevent Falls

Most falls are preventable. Use common sense:

- **Always apply brakes** on a wheelchair before transferring
- Make sure you are close as possible to the surface you are transferring to
- **Always remove footplates**
- If advised to, by your therapist, take the side off your wheelchair. This will help you to transfer more safely.
- Initially you may need somebody to help or supervise your transfer. Your Physiotherapist or Occupational Therapist will advise you when you are safe to do this on your own.
- Before discharge from hospital, an Occupational Therapist will look at your house. They may give advice on lifting rugs, lowering door entrances or how best to arrange furniture for safe transfers.
- It is common for amputees to fall at night. Often they wake up drowsy and need the toilet; they forget they are missing a limb. When they attempt to stand they may lose balance and fall over. There is no real way to prevent this, but be aware that this does happen. Getting into a habit of counting to 10 before you transfer day and night can sometimes help you to orientate yourself
- Don't take unnecessary risks. This is when many people fall, and it can delay rehabilitation by many months if the stump is damaged.

If you have any questions please contact us at;

**Disablement Services Centre, Rehabilitation Department  
Lower Ground Floor, Cumberland Infirmary  
Carlisle, CA2 7HY Tel: 01228 814783 Mon – Friday: 08:30 – 16:30**

## **Transport**

**Transport is available, if you meet the eligibility criteria Otherwise you will need to make your own way to the DSC. Please phone 0800 032 3240 to book your own transport**

## **Confidentiality**

**‘The Trust’s vision is to keep your information safe in our hands.’**

We promise to use your information fairly and legally, and in-line with local and national policies. You have a right to understand how your information is used and you can request a copy of the information we hold about you at any time.

For further information contact the [Subject Access Coordinators](mailto:Subject Access Coordinators)  
[SACCIC@ncuh.nhs.uk](mailto:SACCIC@ncuh.nhs.uk) or [SACWCH@ncuh.nhs.uk](mailto:SACWCH@ncuh.nhs.uk)

## **Feedback**

We appreciate and encourage feedback, which helps us to improve our services. If you have any comments, compliments or complaints to make about your care, please contact the PALS team (Patient Advice and Liaison Service) on 01228 814008 between 10.30 and 4.30 Monday to Friday or email [PALSCIC@ncuh.nhs.uk](mailto:PALSCIC@ncuh.nhs.uk).

If you would like this factsheet in another language or format, for example Braille, large print or audio the PALS team will be able to assist you (contact details above)

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