



Residual Limb Care and Hygiene

For amputees, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” as the saying goes. The skin on your residual limb needs to be healthy to enable you to be as active as possible without experiencing pain or discomfort. New amputees often need to gradually increase the time that they are wearing their artificial limb to let their residual limb adjust to being in a socket. During this time and once you are wearing your artificial limb regularly, proper residual limb hygiene is essential to prevent skin disorders.

Perspiration is one of the common irritants affecting the skin. The skin helps regulate body temperature by producing sweat (perspiration), which evaporates and cools the body. Especially as we head into summer, we often become more active and the heat makes us sweat more, making perspiration more of a concern.

Our perspiration contains solids which accumulate in the socket of an artificial limb and on the residual limb. These solids, combined with the warm, moist environment within the socket, make an ideal breeding ground for **bacteria**. In addition, as perspiration builds up it can also lead to “pistoning” (moving around within the socket), which in turn can chafe the skin and cause **abrasions**.

The residual limb is confined in a socket all day long. Air does not circulate around it to evaporate the perspiration, so sweat can be trapped against the skin. If the residual limb is not kept clean, it may become infected easily and may develop a bad odour. Small irritations from rubbing of the socket may become so serious that the artificial limb cannot be worn.



Clean inside the socket with warm water and mild soap.

The first – and most important – rule for the health of the residual limb is: **KEEP IT CLEAN**. Cleaning the residual limb should become part of your daily routine, just like brushing your teeth.

Keep it Clean

The Residual Limb

- Cleaning the residual limb should preferably be done at night. Morning washes are not advised unless a stump sock is worn because if the skin is damp it can swell and stick to the inside of the socket.
- Wet the skin thoroughly with warm water.
- Use mild fragrance-free soap or an antiseptic cleaner if you prefer.
- Work up a foamy lather. Use more water for more suds.
- Rinse with clean water, making sure all traces of soap are gone. A soapy film left on the skin may be an irritant.
- **Dry skin thoroughly.**

The Socket/Liner

- The socket/liner should be cleaned often – every day in warm weather, to cut down on the accumulation of dried perspiration on the inner surface.
- Wash it at night to give it time to dry thoroughly.
- Wash with warm water (not hot!) and mild soap.
- Wipe out with a cloth dampened in clean water.
- **Dry your socket thoroughly before putting it on. Amputees who use silicone liners might want to consider having two, to allow one to be left for 24 hours to dry.**

The Sock

Wearing a light stump sock may have a cooling effect, as well as providing additional padding for the residual limb. Stump socks can also help wick perspiration away from the skin, for instance one that contains CoolMax® fabric by DuPont.

- The stump sock needs to be changed every day (and sometimes more often in hot weather), and should be washed as soon as it has been taken off so perspiration doesn't dry in it. Use mild soap and warm (never hot!) water.
- Rinse thoroughly.
- A rubber ball of a similar size can be put inside to help retain its shape.

Residual limb
cleansing at night.



As well, freshening up partly through the day (or just after a recreational activity) by cleaning your residual limb, socket and/or liner or sock, is a good idea. Moist towelettes really do come in handy at this time!

Small disorders can quickly get out of hand and, if not properly treated, can lead to a more serious condition preventing you from wearing your artificial limb until the condition heals. If skin disorders do persist, amputees should consult their physician for treatment – a minor disorder may become worse if incorrectly treated. Other articles are available on skin conditions and treatments, that will help you identify skin problems, and cover products that are available to treat specific conditions.