

Caring For Your Stump

A healthy stump is extremely important to keep you mobile...and the good care of your stump is absolutely essential. A stump is the end part of the residual limb, due to an amputation, or congenital limb absence. Prosthesis is an artificial/mechanical device that attempts to mimic the natural function of a limb. The stump is placed firmly into a socket to make the prosthesis work.

The stump is not in its naturally intended environment when it is inside a socket. The skin of the stump is then exposed to weight pressure and to forces of rotational and up and down (pistoning) movements. This continuous process of wearing a prosthesis can have a very profound effect on the health of a stump, its muscles and its skin.

It goes without saying that a comfortable and a well-fitting socket is a preliminary requirement. In some cases an interface is used between the skin of the stump and the inner lining of the socket. The use of an interface reduces the friction between the stump skin and the socket. This interface could be in the form of a sock worn over the stump, made from cotton, nylon, wool or silicone.

Keeping the skin clean and dry is the first rule for stump care. Wash your stump with warm water using ordinary (not perfumed) soap. Hibiscrub Liquid (an antiseptic cleaning liquid - distributed by SSL International) is useful as soap once a week, or daily if the skin is damaged. Surgeons and doctors use this for cleaning and disinfecting their hands before and after operations and other procedures. Skin should be dried carefully with a clean towel. Do not use talcum powder or spirit on the skin. Use a moisturising cream like E45 (made by Crooks Healthcare) or Aqueous Cream if your skin is dry, but only at night or when you are not wearing your prosthesis.

Some skin types are more prone to perspiration. In these circumstances washing more than once a day would be advisable. A suitable antiperspirant like Driclor (a roll-on, made by Stiefel) may help. Only apply when you are not wearing your prosthesis. It is best to avoid chemicals on the skin of your stump whenever you are wearing a prosthesis.

As well as keeping your skin clean, you must keep the interface (socket, socks etc.) clean by washing regularly. Manufacturer's washing instruction should be followed. The socket must be cleaned regularly and preferably on a daily basis. Periodic use of antiseptics like Hibiscrub is good practice for both the interface and the socket. It is important to remove any residual cleaning/antiseptic material before using the prosthesis again.

There are some preparations that can be bought over the counter from your pharmacist to treat minor skin conditions. You must, however, consult your doctor if you are diabetic, or if the skin condition continues.