



Menstruation

THAT Time of the Month



In addition to the usual issues related to their menstrual cycle, women with above knee (or higher level) amputations have issues specific to their amputations to consider.

The War Amps surveyed a group of female amputees to find out how they deal with the issues of THAT time of the month. Not surprisingly, these women, having endured the frustration, discomfort and “accidents” associated with being lower limbs amputees dealing with menstruation, have themselves come up with a number of solutions to the various issues. Their feedback is summarized here.

Sanitary Pads and Tampons

Of particular concern to above knee amputees during their menstrual cycle is the frustration of wearing pads (sanitary napkins). Pads can get caught along the brim of the prosthetic socket and the resulting pressure and rubbing can cause abrasions and sores. The socket brim can also push the pad aside leading to “accidents.”

Some women choose to use tampons for the above reasons and due to personal preference.

Using sanitary pads or tampons is, of course, the personal choice of each woman. Our survey group had the following suggestions concerning pads and tampons:

To help with pads:

- Thick pads move less than thin ones.
- Thin pads are more comfortable and less cumbersome than thick ones.
- Longer (super) pads can provide extra coverage in case the pad shifts.

- Pads with “wings” help reduce shifting of the pad because of the additional adhesive side strips that grip the underwear (although the wings may break off from friction).
- Instead of centering the pad along the underwear, try placing it a bit off-centre, slightly away from the side of the socket – it may keep it from getting caught by the socket brim.
- Because amputees perspire more in the groin area where the socket sits, it may help to change your pad more often.
- One amputee found the plastic of the wings gave her heat rashes, another said she preferred cotton or softer pads as she found the plastic of some products caused irritation.

To help with tampons:

- The tampon string can get caught along the socket brim and be pulled causing discomfort or even resulting in the tampon being displaced, so try trimming the tampon string so it does not get caught in the socket.
- Try using a tampon with a panty liner for extra protection.
- Although unrelated to her amputation, one amputee shared that she uses the more earth and body friendly product called “The Keeper” (thekeeperstore.com). There are other similar reusable products you might wish to explore.

Water Retention and Cramps

Most women retain water during their menstrual cycles so prosthetic sockets and suspension belts may not fit as comfortably as during the rest of the month. Many female amputees notice they are less comfortable in their sockets during those days when their body experiences some bloating.

For amputees whose prostheses have suspension belts that extend around the hips and across the tummy, the belt's snug pressure can aggravate menstrual cramps and bloating. Amputees shared these suggestions:

To help with bloating and cramping when wearing a suspension belt:

- Try loosening the belt during menstruation, and adjust it to a lower spot on your hips.
- You may have your belt fitted by your prosthetist to sit lower on your hips so as not to aggravate any bloating.
- Cramping and bloating is sometimes so severe, you may need to stay off your artificial leg and not wear it for the day.
- Many women can use over-the-counter medicine such as acetaminophen (e.g., Midol, Pamprin, Tylenol) to relieve pain from cramps or ibuprofen/nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (e.g., Advil, Motrin) to reduce bloating. Before taking any new medications, discuss your options with your physician.
- Should over-the-counter medicine not sufficiently relieve the bloating and cramping, your family physician or gynaecologist may be able to prescribe a drug that is more suitable for you.
- Take a hot bath to soothe the pressure, and exercise.

To help with swelling of the residual limb caused by bloating that makes the socket uncomfortable:

- Wrap the residual limb with tensor bandages overnight.

- Elevate the residual limb and apply cool clothes or ice when not wearing the artificial leg.

Socket Issues and Solutions

The simple fact that above knee amputees wear a prosthetic socket that extends into the groin area means the socket has to be a consideration in dealing with monthly menstrual periods. It may be an issue with the fit of sanitary pads or tampons. It may be general discomfort and abrasions that result in some amputees choosing to walk less if possible during those days.

One adjustment that might help is reducing the width of the socket brim that extends into the groin area. Depending on the size of the socket's brim, the prosthetist may be able to make the brim narrower. Only an amputee's prosthetist can advise whether reducing the brim is possible without interfering with the fit and control of the socket.

"Accidents" do sometimes occur which may simply necessitate a good cleaning of your socket brim. If you wear stump socks, these may need to be replaced more frequently. In addition, if a strip of leather or compressed foam has been attached along your socket brim for comfort, it may need replacement if soiled.

Underwear Tips

The amputees surveyed had suggestions on underwear, not all related to menstruation issues.

Unrelated to menstruation, you may choose underwear that is cut higher around the hips as these panties do not extend down over the hip and into the outer wall of the socket. When panties do work down into that outer lateral brim of the socket, the friction can cause sores. Other suggestions included:

- Cutting out the elastic along the sides of the gusset section of the underwear, as this is the part that always gets caught in the socket brim.
 - Wearing underwear with ribbon edging instead of elastic (although such underwear is not always easy to find in stores).
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To Conclude

Menstruation is a reality of life that amputee women deal with like they do all other aspects of life as amputees. Perhaps one or more of the suggestions noted here will make that time of the month a little less bothersome.

