



The Rehabilitation Team

Understanding the roles of the various professionals involved in your care will help better prepare you for the rehabilitation process. The professionals you encounter will work with you before, during and after the amputation to facilitate your recovery. It is important to have a good relationship with your rehabilitation team, and to ask any questions you have. Remember, as the amputee, you are the most important member of the team, and the only way you will feel comfortable and confident about your care is with your active participation, and if you have all your questions answered and concerns addressed.

Your rehabilitation team includes the many professionals you will see through the various stages of your rehabilitation. Depending on your individual situation, you may meet them in the hospital environment, as an out-patient, or at a prosthetic centre. In addition to those covered here, you may also seek the services of other healthcare professionals such as dieticians, massage therapists and chiropractors.

The professionals involved in your care are instrumental in helping you to set and meet your rehabilitation objectives. In addition, the support of family and friends is crucial during this time. It is also valuable to meet other amputees who have already been through the rehabilitation process. Ask your social worker what resources and services are available to you and how to access them. Seeking the support you require will ease your rehabilitation.

The general roles of many of the professionals you will encounter are described here, but the specific responsibilities of each will vary within rehabilitation teams.

Nurse

Nurses provide medical care to patients dealing with acute and long-term illnesses, diseases, or injuries. While you are in the hospital or rehabilitation centre following amputation, nurses oversee your daily care – they monitor your vital signs, administer pain medication, bandage your residual limb, and assist with all your daily needs. They also teach you self-care techniques you will need to know before leaving the hospital.

Nurses work mainly in hospitals, but in rural areas they also have prominent roles in the community, attached to a health centre or general practice, and in residential homes, schools and hospices. They often have roles in educating the public about good health.



Occupational Therapist

The occupational therapist (OT) provides training to individuals with physical, mental or social challenges in functional tasks including activities of daily living, work skills, and leisure skills. OTs assess a person's ability to perform activities and design appropriate treatments to address the needs, with the goal to increase an individual's independence, confidence and control.



OTs teach amputees adaptive skills and practical solutions for daily living. A few examples are: teaching an arm amputee to carry out daily tasks in a new way with or without a prosthesis, including specific skills like eating with a knife and fork; recommending assistive devices to make activities easier for a leg amputee, such as grab bars for balance in the shower; or determining what devices are required by an amputee to drive a car.

Oncologist

Oncologists specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of cancer. They remain a part of your rehabilitation team throughout your treatment for the disease. After an amputation due to cancer, your cancer treatment may continue for weeks, months or longer.

Facing these two situations at the same time – cancer and amputation – is difficult. In addition to answering your questions about the disease, your oncologist will also liaise with other members of your rehabilitation team to share how the cancer will affect your rehabilitation.

Orthopaedic Surgeon or Specialist

Orthopaedics is the medical specialty devoted to the diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation, and prevention of injuries and diseases of the body's musculoskeletal system. Orthopaedic specialists/surgeons specialize in the care and treatment of deformities, diseases and injuries of the bones, joints and muscles.

The orthopaedic surgeon performs the amputation surgery and any revision surgery that may be necessary later. You will meet with the surgeon beforehand to discuss the surgery, unless it is an emergency situation that makes this impossible. After the surgery, the orthopaedic surgeon will oversee the healing of your residual limb and outline your rehabilitation needs. Once the work of the orthopaedic surgeon is complete, your amputation-related care is usually overseen by another professional, such as a physiatrist.

Orthotist

The orthotist provides care to individuals with disabling conditions of their limbs or spine by recommending, fitting, fabricating and maintaining orthopaedic braces that support or limit the movement of weakened joints or limbs. Some professionals are trained in either prosthetics or orthotics, while some are trained in both disciplines.

Amputees may sometimes require orthotic care for parts of their bodies beyond their amputations. For example, some amputees have been fitted with a support brace on their sound limb to provide protection and reduce the risk of injury, especially for active pursuits, or if their sound limb has also been weakened by disease or injury.



Physiatrist

The physiatrist specializes in physical medicine and rehabilitation and treats the whole body, assessing the physical, mental and occupational rehabilitation needs of the patient. The physiatrist does not treat the amputation as just a missing arm or leg but takes into consideration the overall effects of the amputation on the rest of the body and vice versa.

Following an amputation, the care of the amputee for ongoing amputation-related issues is often overseen by a physiatrist. It is the physiatrist who recommends physio- and/or occupational therapy and is often responsible for prescribing your need for a prosthesis.

Physician

The physician is commonly referred to as a family doctor. Your physician is the professional in charge of overseeing your general health.



It is imperative that your physician be familiar with all aspects of the care you are receiving from other specialists and the strategies being followed throughout your rehabilitation. Your physician needs all this information in order to take your full medical history into account when treating you for other health problems unrelated to your amputation and in order to recognize any changes in your health status.

Physiotherapist

The physiotherapist (PT) carries out individually-designed treatment programs to maintain, improve or restore physical functioning, alleviate pain, and prevent physical dysfunction.

The treatment goals PTs establish are based on the person's physical diagnosis and evaluations of the person's functional abilities. Some therapies PTs use are therapeutic exercise, manipulations, massage, electro-therapeutic and other mechanical equipment, and hydro-therapy. A few examples of how they assist amputees are: sessions to build strength and range of motion in your residual limb following amputation; a conditioning program to increase your endurance to make using a prosthesis or other aids easier; gait training on how to utilize a prosthesis; or suggestions of mobility



aids or adaptations that might be helpful around your home.

Prosthetist

The prosthetist is the professional who designs and fabricates prostheses for individuals with partial or total absence of a limb. The prosthetist takes all of your physical abilities and challenges, as well as your personal goals, into consideration in determining which components to recommend for your prosthesis, and from there the prosthetist custom designs and fits the prosthesis to meet your specific needs.

Your prosthetist remains an integral part of your life, as adjustments, repairs and new prostheses will be regularly required throughout your life. Some prosthetists work in prosthetic clinics connected to a rehabilitation centre or hospital, while others provide prosthetic care through private clinics.



Psychologist

Losing a limb affects all areas of a person's life, and there are professionals to support your emotional and psychological adjustment to limb loss.

A psychologist applies methods and theories of psychology with the aim to reduce psychological distress and enhance and promote psychological wellbeing. The psychologist often works as part of a multidisciplinary team to help individuals make positive adjustments as they face the life-changing experience of amputation.

Specifically, a psychologist can help you deal with how amputation impacts all areas of your life, help you adjust to your new body image, provide specific coping skills, as well as offer family and couple counselling.

Social Worker

The social worker treats social functioning difficulties, through counselling, therapy and referral to other supportive social services. Social workers are responsible for the day-to-day coordination of psychosocial programs, activities and professional services for individuals and their families, including those who are dealing with disease, injury, and disability.

Social workers help in numerous ways, such as: referring you to other agencies and community resources to meet your specific needs; helping to coordinate any financial assistance you need; putting you in touch with services related to housing, social support and family counselling; or suggesting meeting family and loved ones to discuss issues that arise from the amputation.

Vocational Counsellor

The vocational rehabilitation counsellor evaluates your vocational abilities and employment history. Vocational counsellors can connect you with career training or re-training and job placement services. They can recommend any adaptations and equipment that may be necessary for you in a particular workplace, as well as related to your transportation to/from the workplace.

In Canada, various government agencies or departments can connect you with vocational rehabilitation services and have programs and services for people with disabilities, such as career counselling, on-line employment services, and employment opportunities.

