

Act Fast:

Making Empowered Decisions

Considering Amputation - What You Need To Know

Hearing that you need an amputation can be overwhelming, and it is normal to have lots of questions and worries. But being prepared can help you take control of your journey and may even lead to better outcomes.

By understanding your options, asking the right questions, and seeking support, you can make informed decisions and feel more confident about what lies ahead.

Making an Informed Decision

When considering amputation options, it's important to evaluate all the potential impacts to make a well-informed choice.

Social

Your recovery as you adjust to life after an amputation can challenge your relationships and connections with your community. There are many programs available that support social reintegration and help create new social connections, opening doors for fresh friendships and opportunities.

Emotional

The emotional journey of amputation may bring challenges such as grief, loss, and shifts in your sense of identity. Understanding these emotional impacts and how to cope with them is crucial. Support is available through counselling services and peer support groups, including those specifically designed for amputees, as well as your family and healthcare staff.

Physical Impacts

Adjusting to the physical aspects of amputation may involve challenges such as pain management, physical limitations, and the need for rehabilitation. Access to services can help you manage these limitations, improve mobility, and increase independence. With the right support, many people find that they can regain significant function and lead an active life.

Legal Impacts

Legal protections are in place to ensure you receive the necessary healthcare and support, as well as to safeguard against unfair treatment in the workplace and other areas of life. Familiarising yourself with these rights and available services can help you make informed decisions and ensure you receive the support you're entitled to.

Seeking support from healthcare professionals, community organisations, and local Indigenous health services can help guide you through the process. Talking with community leaders can also help make sure your cultural needs and personal preferences are taken into account along the way, including advice on returning your limb to be buried on Country.

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How can I make sure my needs are heard?

It is important that your cultural and health needs are respected throughout your care. Here are some ways to make sure your voice is heard:

- Be open with your healthcare team about what matters to you and discuss all your options.
- Write down your questions before appointments to make sure you remember everything you want to ask.
- Indigenous health organisations, like AHCSA , can connect you with culturally safe healthcare and support.
- Connect with the hospital Aboriginal liaison officers and Aboriginal health workers for extra support. They can yarn with you about how you are feeling and advocate for your wants and needs to be heard by the medical team. Ask your nurse about how to connect with this support.
- If it feels overwhelming, ask a trusted family or community member to support or advocate for you.

You have the right to be involved in decisions about your care, so don't be afraid to speak up and get the support you need.

Understanding your individual amputation needs

Every person's experience with amputation is different, and understanding your specific needs will help you prepare for the journey ahead. Amputation can occur for many reasons such as complications related to diabetes, infection, accidents or cancer.

These information sheets focus on major leg (major) amputations as the healthcare journey is very different compared to other toe or part of the foot (minor) amputations.

Talking with your family before surgery and having open discussions with your doctors, specialists, and support network can help you make the right decisions for you and your lifestyle.

The following information is general, but the questions should help you understand the process and advocate for your needs.

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What will the surgery involve?

Amputation is a major surgery, and knowing what to expect can help you prepare physically and emotionally. The procedure will be different depending on the reason for your amputation, the location of the limb removal, and your overall health.

While every surgery is different, most amputation procedures follow a similar process:

- You will receive anaesthesia (either general anaesthetic to put you to sleep or a spinal anaesthetic to numb the lower body).
- The surgeon will remove the sick body part at the necessary point, making sure there is enough healthy tissue for healing.
- The surgeon will smooth the edges of the bones, reattach muscles, adjust muscles, make sure there is good blood supply for healing and seal nerves to reduce pain and discomfort later on.
- The wound will be closed with stitches or staples, and a bandage or dressing will be applied to protect the area. A drainage tube may be placed to prevent fluid buildup.
- After surgery, you will be taken to a recovery area for monitoring before you return to the ward.

Before surgery, your healthcare team will explain the process, answer your questions, and discuss pain management and recovery. If possible, you may also meet with a rehabilitation specialist or prosthetist to plan for life after the procedure.

These are all great opportunities to ask any questions you may have. Your medical team is here to support you through this journey.

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What risks should I be aware of?

Like any operation, amputation carries some risks, which your doctor will discuss with you before the procedure.

Common risks include:

- Infection
- Poor Healing
- Phantom Limb sensation or pain (sensations or pain where the limb used to be)
- Blood Clots
- Swelling and Pain
- Emotional and Psychological Effects

Every amputation is different, so you may experience none of these risks, or more than one. It is important to speak to your healthcare team about these risks and how they can be managed.

Who will support my recovery at home?

Adjusting to life after an amputation can be a big change, and having the right people around you can make all the difference.

Talking openly with your family and friends about what's happening and what to expect will help them support you in the best way possible.

If certain people will be supporting you day-to-day, it might help to bring them along to doctor's appointments or meetings with specialists so they can better understand your journey and what to expect.

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What kind of rehabilitation will I need?

Rehabilitation is an important part of recovery to help you regain strength and independence.

Your rehabilitation plan will be tailored to your needs, but typically includes:

- Wound Care & Pain Management
- Physiotherapy
- Occupational Therapy
- Podiatry to care for your other foot
- Prosthetic Training (if applicable)
- Mental & Emotional Wellbeing

Recovery times vary from person to person. Your healthcare team will work with you to set goals and create a rehabilitation plan that suits your needs.

What is a prosthetic?

Will I be able to use a prosthetic limb?

What other options are available?

A prosthetic is an artificial body part used to replace a missing limb or other part of the body, helping a person regain function and mobility.

Many people find that prosthetics help them regain mobility and independence, and your healthcare team will work with you to figure out the best option for your needs.

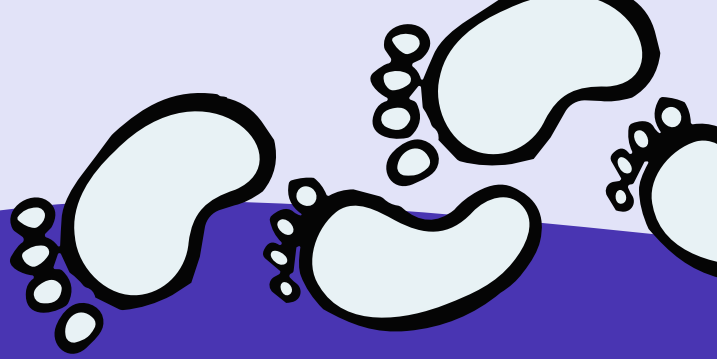
Whether you can use a prosthetic limb will depend on your type of amputation, your overall health, and what you hope to achieve.

If a prosthetic limb isn't right for you, there are still other options, including mobility aids like a wheelchair, or technology devices designed to help with specific tasks.

Your healthcare team is there to guide you through all your options and help you find the best path forward for your situation.

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What emotional and mental health support is available?

Life after an amputation can be challenging, but there are services to support you. In addition to rehabilitation and physiotherapy, it is important to consider the impact an amputation can have on your overall wellbeing.

Options to consider include:

- **Mental Health Support:** Programs like SEWB (Social and Emotional Wellbeing) available through Aboriginal health services, 13 Yarn, Wellmob website, BeyondBlue, and Lifeline offer emotional support.
- **Cultural Healing and Community Support:** Staying connected to your culture and community can be a powerful source of comfort. Many Indigenous health services blend traditional healing with medical care. Some hospitals offer traditional healing, and you can request a visit from Aboriginal health workers or liaison officers.

If you are interested in accessing these services, you can speak to your nurse, the Aboriginal health team, or hospital social worker.

What financial assistance is available to help with my recovery and ongoing care?

There are several financial support options available to help with medical costs, rehabilitation, mobility aids, and everyday living expenses after an amputation.

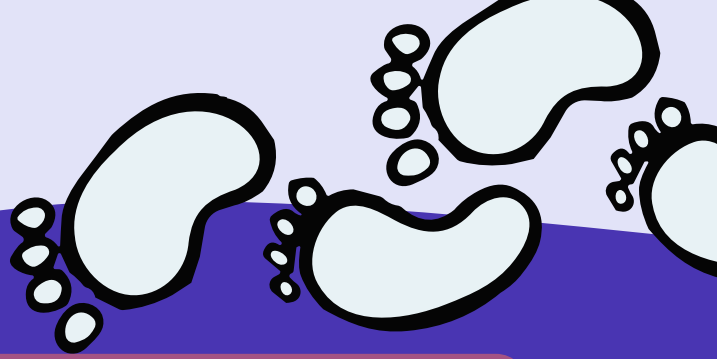
The type of assistance you can access will depend on your circumstances, but here are some key options to explore:

- **The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)** provides funding for people under 65 years old with permanent disabilities, including amputees. It can help cover:
 - Prosthetics, footwear, orthotics and mobility aids
 - Home modifications (such as ramps or handrails)
 - Physiotherapy, occupational therapy, podiatry and rehabilitation
 - Support services for daily living and community participation

To check if you're eligible and start the application process, visit the NDIS website or speak with an Indigenous disability support organisation. Your rehabilitation team can also help you with this.

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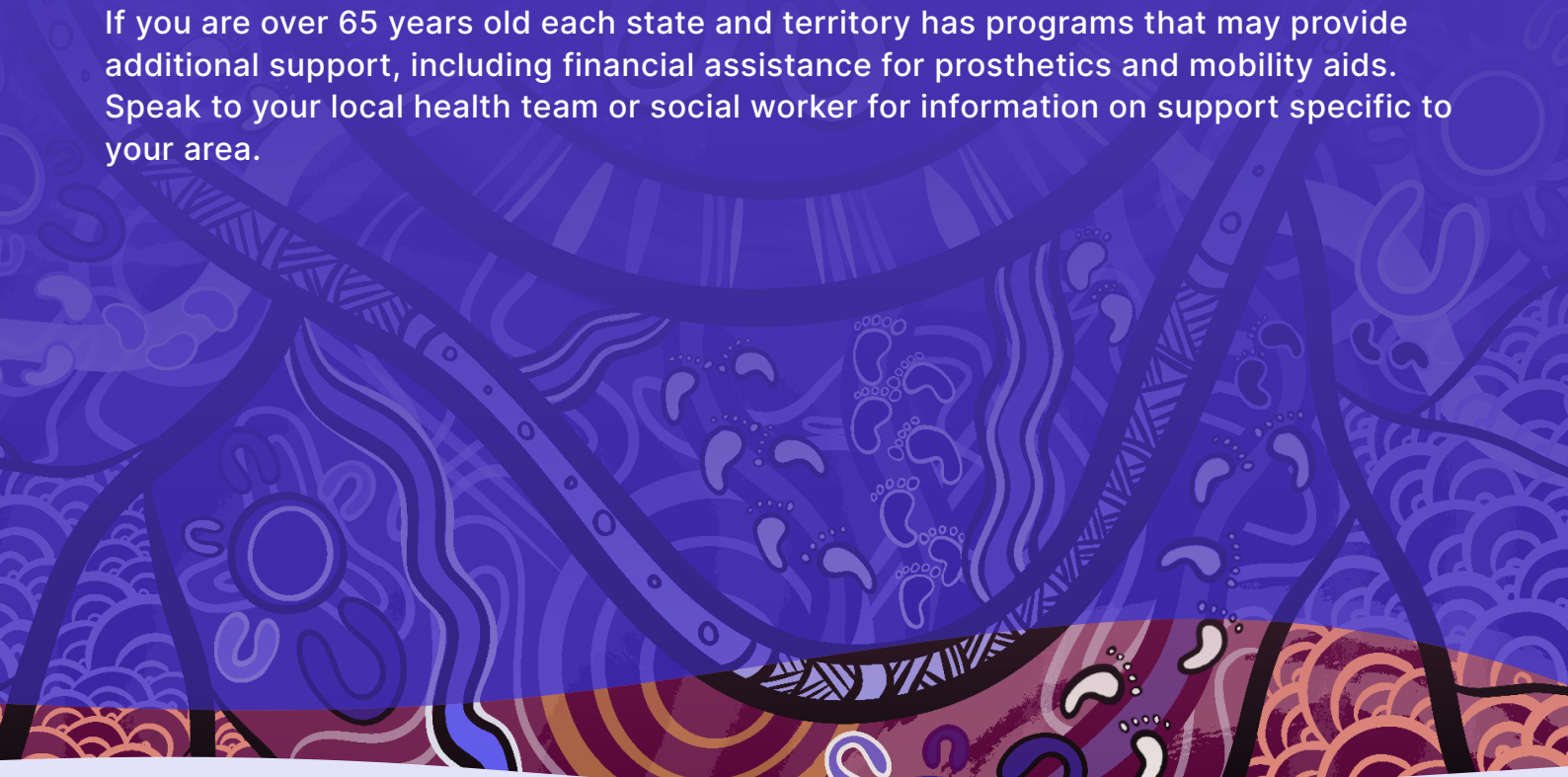
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What financial assistance is available to help with my recovery and ongoing care? (continued)

- **My Aged Care** provides funding to people aged over 65 years old to help them remain in their own home, or move into an aged care home. The Elder Care Support program through Aboriginal community controlled health services can help you navigate My Aged Care.
- **Centrelink** offers financial assistance for people who are unable to work or need extra support after an amputation, including the Disability Support Pension (DSP), Mobility Allowance and Carer Allowance. Visit servicesaustralia.gov.au for more information.
- **If you are a returned service person**, Department of Veteran Affairs (DVA) may be able to assist with financial assistance.
- **WorkCover** or another workplace insurance scheme may offer compensation or support if your amputation is due to a workplace injury. If you have private health insurance, check whether it covers prosthetics, rehabilitation, or home modifications.
- **If your amputation is due to a motor vehicle accident**, Lifetime Support Authority will assist in planning and funding your medical costs.
- **Aboriginal community controlled health organisations and Aboriginal medical services can help connect you to these resources.**

If you are over 65 years old each state and territory has programs that may provide additional support, including financial assistance for prosthetics and mobility aids. Speak to your local health team or social worker for information on support specific to your area.



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How can I find out more?

Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia

www.ahcsa.org.au/members/locations/

Peak body representing Aboriginal community-controlled health services in South Australia.

Limbs4life

www.limbs4life.org.au/

Providing support to amputees, their families and care givers.

13Yarn

13 92 76 / www.13yarn.org.au/

National support line for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people in crisis.

WellMob

<https://wellmob.org.au/>

Social, emotional and cultural wellbeing online resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

NDIS

www.ndis.gov.au/

Federal Government program to support Australians with disability to live more independently and achieve their goals.

My Aged Care

www.myagedcare.gov.au/

Federal government support program for Indigenous Australians aged over 50 years.

Elder Care Support program

<https://ahcsa.org.au/programs/elder-care-support>

To help navigate and connect with aged care services.

Health Care Rights

https://www.hcscs.sa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/21_02_10-ATSI-Know-Your-Rights_f.pdf

Explains your rights when you are using South Australian Health services.

Your rights at work

<https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/employee-rights-under-disability-discrimination-act>

Your rights as an employee under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth).

Disability Gateway

<https://www.disabilitygateway.gov.au/>

The websites above may change over time, ask your health care team for suggestions if you need support.

We recognise First Nations peoples' cultural, spiritual, physical and emotional connection with their land. We honour and pay our respects to First Nations Elders, both past and present. We acknowledge and thank the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who shared their stories and expertise to codevelop these resources.



To view the videos that support this booklet, please scan this qr code or visit the Limbs 4 Life website.

<https://www.limbs4life.org.au/aboriginal-resources>

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