

Tips For Enhancing Your Success as a User of a Lower-Limb Prosthesis

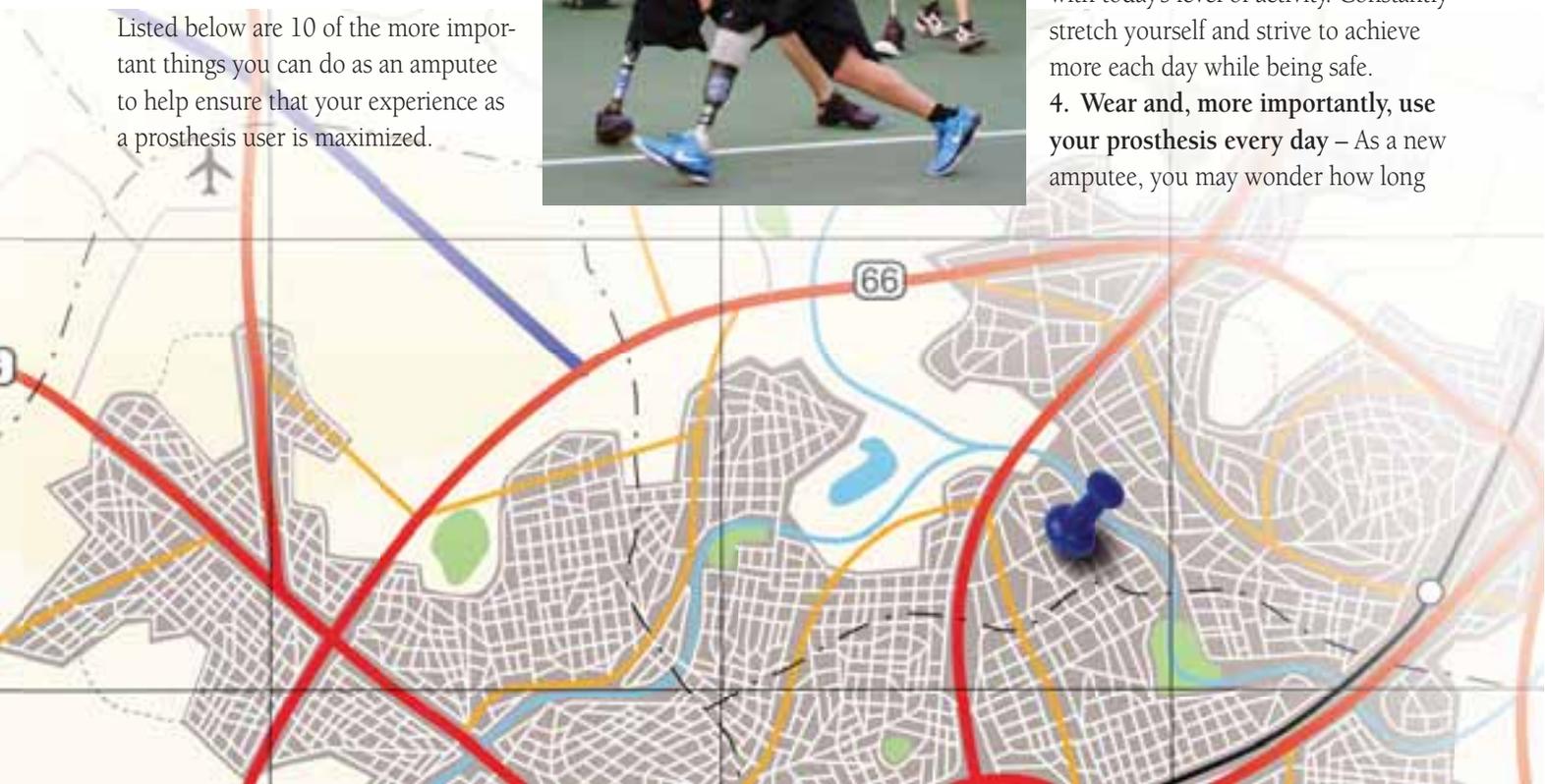
by John Peter Seaman, CP, CTP

Even for the most experienced wearers of lower-limb prostheses, using a prosthesis can result in daily inconveniences, if not worse. So what can recent amputees do to enhance their experience after being fitted with a prosthesis? First, accept that successful prosthesis use involves a 50/50 effort between the amputee and his or her prosthetist. Second, amputees need to understand that their prosthetist, in most cases, is not a miracle worker. In simplest terms, the prosthetist's role is to assess the amputee's physical potential, select appropriate prosthetic componentry, and provide a tool, in the form of a prosthesis, for the amputee to use to achieve his or her desired ADLs (activities of daily living). Once this is accomplished, it is up to the amputee to do the many things necessary to maximize the benefits offered by a comfortably fitting and properly functioning prosthesis.

Listed below are 10 of the more important things you can do as an amputee to help ensure that your experience as a prosthesis user is maximized.



- 1. Be compliant** – Properly clean the inside of your liners after wearing them, examine your residual limb each day to be sure you don't have any issues that need to be addressed (skin breakdown) and, when needed, wear prosthetic socks to enhance your socket fit. You might also want to wear a shrinker while you sleep to help shape your residual limb and reduce swelling overnight, especially if you are a recent amputee.
- 2. Don't procrastinate** – If you have an issue with socket fit, comfort or prosthetic function, schedule an appointment to see your prosthetist right away. Don't let what seems like a small issue grow into a major one, especially if you have diabetes and have skin breakdown that could become infected or your prosthesis is not functioning in a safe manner.
- 3. Establish personal goals** – Set some goals involving physical activities that gradually increase your prosthesis use as time goes by. Don't be satisfied with today's level of activity. Constantly stretch yourself and strive to achieve more each day while being safe.
- 4. Wear and, more importantly, use your prosthesis every day** – As a new amputee, you may wonder how long



you should wear your prosthesis each day. A standard answer would be, "As much as possible." If your prosthesis fits comfortably, you should be able to put it on in the morning and wear it until you go to bed at night. Also, by wearing it all day, you will be more inclined to use it more regularly. Your prosthesis will not do you any good if it is sitting in a closet collecting dust.

5. **Become experimental** – As an amputee, you will have to learn how to successfully use a prosthesis, and, yes, it requires work on your part. Your residual limb will not fit in the prosthetic socket the same way each day or even throughout the day. You need to be sensitive to what you are feeling in the socket and learn what you can do to effect positive changes in your socket fit, like adding or taking away full-length or partial-length prosthetic socks or removing and redonning a liner that has slipped due to a build-up of perspiration.
6. **Exercise regularly** – As a new lower-limb amputee, you have lost some musculature in your affected leg, so you have fewer muscles to use when standing, walking or running. You'll need to strengthen those remaining muscles to stand in a stable manner and walk with an efficient gait. This will take several weeks or months and require a lot of effort. Working with a physical therapist soon after your initial prosthetic fitting to shorten the learning process is highly recommended.

7. **Control your diet** – As a lower-limb amputee, in many cases, you will initially be less active than you were prior to your amputation. Such a sedentary lifestyle will often result in your gaining weight. It is important to understand this and to adjust your nutritional intake to match your activity level so that you do not gain appreciable amounts of weight during this period of transition. If your weight fluctuates significantly after being fitted with a prosthesis, intimate socket fit can be compromised.
8. **Accept and embrace your situation** – Everyone deals with amputation in his or her own way, some more smoothly than others. The sooner you can come to grips with the fact that you're an amputee and that your life has not ended, the

better. Most lower-limb amputees are able to return to very full lifestyles after they become accustomed to using a prosthesis and understand that being a successful prosthesis user can be as dependent on dealing successfully with mental adjustments as physical ones.

9. **Strive for independence** – Immediately after your amputation, it is normal to seek out and receive assistance from family members or friends to help you during this transition. However, at some point – the sooner, the better – you should strive to become as independent again as possible. With a comfortably fitting and properly functioning prosthesis, you should be able to do many, if not all, of the things you did before becoming an amputee.

10. **Focus on the future** – Few, if any, amputees are thrilled with having become amputees and having to rely on a prosthesis to live their normal lives. Those who do well accept their situation and make a conscious decision to not let it get in the way of living life to the fullest. Don't be misled, however; not every day as an amputee will be a walk in the park. Often, you'll need to exhibit an immense amount of patience and perseverance. However, if you focus on the positives in life versus dwelling on the negatives, with sincere effort and determination, you should be able to live a long, fulfilling life as a prosthesis user.



Photo courtesy of Bill Nessel

Please forward any questions or comments to the author at jpseaman@aol.com. ■