



# One Step at a Time: *Recovering From Limb Loss*

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**R**ecovery may be defined as a return to a normal condition.

## *Individuals Recover Differently*

Have you ever wondered why some people seem to bounce back from the tragedies in their lives, while others find themselves trapped in a cycle of despair, anger or depression? Most of us will, from time to time, compare ourselves to those around us. It is natural, then, for people with limb loss to compare their recovery process to the experiences of other amputees.

## *What Is Recovery*

Livneh and Antonak in *Psychosocial Adaptation to Chronic Illness and Disability* (1997) list six signs of recovery:

- A sense of balance in emotions and relationships
- Awareness of abilities and limitations
- Positive self-concept and a sense of accomplishment
- Ability to get around in the environment
- Participation in social, vocational and/or recreational activities
- Setting priorities.

Recovery is a tall order for anyone, with or without limb loss!

Whatever recovery means to you:

- Take time to learn what makes everyone's recovery different.
- Determine your personal goals.
- Ask for help when you need it.

There are many issues that affect recovery from amputation.

These can be divided into four categories:

### 1. Issues related to the amputation

- Whether the amputation was sudden or due to a chronic, debilitating illness
- The level of the amputation
- Whether the amputation surgery was successful in stabilizing the condition that caused it
- How the day-to-day ability to function will be affected

### 2. Individual characteristics

- Age or health status. Obviously, the older you are, the greater the chance that you have other conditions (known as comorbid conditions) that could impact your recovery.
- Current stage of life
- Financial status
- Ethnic background

### 3. Personality traits

- Coping strategies used before the surgery
- Sense of control over the situation
- Attitudes toward health and sickness
- Self-concept and body image
- Experience coping with other similar losses

### 4. Characteristics of the physical and social environment

- Availability of a support system, such as family, friends or a support group
- Availability of appropriate medical care
- Accessibility of services in the community
- Living arrangements
- How other people view limb loss

## The Recovery Process

The Amputee Coalition of America uses six phases to describe the recovery process of amputation.

PHASE	CHARACTERISTIC	DESCRIPTION
Enduring	Surviving amputation surgery and the pain that follows	Hanging on; focusing on present to get through the pain; blocking out distress about future - it is a conscious choice not to deal with the full meaning of the loss; self-protection
Suffering	Questioning: Why me? How will I . . . ?	Intense feelings about the loss: fear, denial, anger, depression; vulnerable and confused; return to Enduring stage; emotional anguish about the loss of self adds to the pain
Reckoning	Becoming aware of the new reality	Coming to terms with the extent of the loss; accepting what is left after the loss; implications of the loss for future - how will roles change; ongoing process; minimizing own losses in comparison to others' losses
Reconciling	Putting the loss in perspective	Regaining control; increased awareness of one's strengths and uniqueness; more assertive; taking control of one's life; self-management of illness and recovery; changed body image; need for intimacy
Normalizing	Reordering priorities	Bringing balance to one's life; establishing and maintaining new routines; once again, doing the things that matter; allowing priorities other than the loss to dominate; advocating for self
Thriving	Living life to the fullest	Being more than before; trusting self and others; confidence; being a role model to others; this level of recovery is not attained by everyone

### *The Recovery Process*

Recovery from amputation is an ongoing process.

It is clear that:

- Not everyone has the same response to amputation.
- The highest level of recovery is not achieved by everyone.
- Recovery does not happen in a particular order. Individuals may experience phases one after another and then regress to an earlier phase. A person might skip one or more phases, or one phase could overlap with another.
- Each phase of recovery requires different coping patterns.

### *Resources for Recovery*

A variety of resources exist to help you successfully recover from amputation.

- Peer visitation
- Amputee support groups
- Online support groups
- Amputee Coalition of America Web site ([www.amputee-coalition.org](http://www.amputee-coalition.org))
- Individual or group counseling with a social worker or psychologist
- Vocational Rehabilitation
- Supportive family and friends

Still not sure how to get the help you need? Call the Amputee Coalition of America at 888/267-5669 and speak with an information specialist. ❖

