

Can physical activity for health be promoted in those who have limb absence?

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- **Have you ever wondered what it would feel like to have your leg amputated?**
- **What do you think it would feel like to wear a prosthesis (artificial limb)?**
- **How might you walk or ride a bicycle whilst wearing a prosthesis?**



The clinical population

During 2010-2011, 5988 people were referred to UK prosthetic rehabilitation services. Of the 5469 of those referred who had lower limb absence, almost 70% were referred due to dysvascular causes (impaired circulation), and 70% of these people were over 54 years of age.¹ Looking at the levels of lower limb absence, the primary cause of amputation, and age factors, **it would be reasonable to think there may be low levels of fitness and activity in people with amputation.** Uniquely, people with limb absence receive lifelong care from Prosthetists and other members of the rehabilitation team.

The problem

The problem is physical inactivity or being sedentary, and the figures are alarming for the United Kingdom; only 40% of men and 28% of women meet the minimum recommendations for physical activity in adults.

In Scotland, “72% of women and 59% of men are not active enough for health”.

This makes physical inactivity the most prevalent risk factor for coronary heart disease, even more prevalent than obesity and smoking.²

References

- 1 Limbless Statistics Annual Report 2010-2011 www.limbless-statistics.org
- 2 The Department of Health. 2009. *Be active, be healthy: A plan for getting the nation moving.* www.gov.uk

Physical activity promotion

We should all aim to be more active and any activity is better than none. Could the same physical activity promotional strategies be employed in routine prosthetic rehabilitation as those which have been successful in the general population? Wearing a prosthesis should not be a barrier to increasing physical activity and living more actively.

Could healthcare professionals who are responsible for the lifelong care of someone with amputation be willing and able to promote physical activity (PA)?

A 40-question, online survey was designed using web-based software Qualtrics. The survey had the following objectives:

- To ascertain UK healthcare professionals knowledge of PA guidelines, and their current practices in relation to PA promotion
- To canvas UK healthcare professionals views on incorporating PA promotion into their routine clinical care
- To build a demographic and descriptive picture about those who complete the survey

The survey was open between October 2013 and March 2014 to all with a duty of care to people with limb absence.

Early results

109 responses were received from Prosthetists, Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapists, Rehabilitation Consultants, and Nurses. Prosthetists are the professional group with greatest potential to promote physical activity as part of lifelong routine clinical care.

Prosthetists understand they are in a unique position to positively promote and reinforce the physical activity message, but could be supported to increase their knowledge of physical activity guidelines. Similarly, the barriers to Prosthetists promoting physical activity should be investigated.

