

Choosing a Prosthetist Who Is Right for You

An amputation, whether it is a result of trauma, disease, or birth defect, can turn the patient's world upside down. A new amputee experiences intense emotions and has so many things to think about. Finding a prosthetist who will fit and fabricate the prosthesis to provide the highest level of comfort, mobility and function, is a selection that should be made carefully and with as much information as possible.

To help with the selection process, Certified Prosthetist/Orthotist Jonas Seeberg, president of Real Life Prosthetics, Abingdon, Md., has developed not only a question list, but information that should be covered in the answers.



Prosthetist Jonas Seeberg, left, adjusts the componentry of an upper extremity patient.

your device as you pursue your goals (walking, running, cycling, rock climbing, kayaking, etc.). The same dialoguing should take place with each component (suspension systems, knee systems, foot design, skin coverings, etc.).

If you are in need of a custom silicone restoration such as a finger, toe, partial hand, partial foot, etc., then it is important that your prosthetist have a good working relationship with an anaplastologist. This will ensure that your high-definition mold is secured correctly; that your wax model is sculpted with precision to assure symmetry; and that your custom silicone restoration is painted and finished with correct detail (capillary systems, venous systems, finger/toe prints, moles, blemishes, hair, nails, etc.) to fully restore a real life appearance. For more information on silicone restoration, visit www.alatheia.com.

What is your education and background specific to prosthetics?

As an amputee, it is in your best interest to inquire about your prosthetist's credentialing before committing to the process of having your device made.

A qualified prosthetic provider should have collegiate-level knowledge in: anatomy and physiology, material science, computer assisted design (CAD), model rectification (digital or hands-on sculpting), up-to-date prosthetic components, communication skills, ethical standards of integrity and compassion for others.

To learn more about the educational pathways for prosthetists and orthotists, visit the National Commission on Orthotic and Prosthetic Education (NCOPE) at www.ncope.org.

What educational resources are available to me?

Your prosthetist should be able to provide you with educational materials. Some of these materials should include:

- An above-the-knee (AK) or below-the-knee (BK) educational pamphlet to help you learn specific details about important aspects of prosthetic rehabilitation.
- Information about the facility in which you may receive your care (company brochure, policies and procedures, insurance coverage, etc.).
- In-Step magazine or First Step magazine distributed by the Amputee Coalition of America (ACA).

The ACA is an incredible educational resource for all amputees and may be found online at: www.amputee-coalition.org. Another informative Web site to visit is www.amputee-network.blogspot.com.

You should also get connected with an amputee support group in your area to help build a strong team of persons facing similar challenges within your community.

What are my prosthetic options for helping me accomplish my goals?

It is important to discuss various prosthetic socket designs with your prosthetist to gain an understanding of which one is best suited for your anatomical presentation. Your prosthetist should be able to provide you with at least two designs. I cannot stress enough that one prosthetic design is not best suited for all amputees. One's amputation type coupled with anatomical, physiological, and psychological profiles results in a vast array of prosthetic options. Your socket is uniquely fabricated to interface with your residual limb to provide a comfortable fit that does not lead to skin irritation, breakdown, or abnormal discoloration. The socket is also the anchoring point which ensures you have optimal control of

Do I have realistic goals and expectations?

It is important that you have real life expectations about your rehabilitation potential. Your prosthesis will not give you the ability to leap tall buildings or outrun locomotives if you were not Superman before your amputation. You should reflect on what your daily routine entailed prior to surgery and have this be your initial rehabilitation goal. It is always important to listen to your body and allow it time for recovery as it adapts to the new forces being applied on it. Find happiness in the small victories such as standing on two feet again. It is easy to vent your frustrations on your prosthetist and point the blame for not being able to do the things you want to do within the time restraints you feel are appropriate. You need to know, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that your prosthetist is on your side and wants nothing but the best for you. Remember that you and your prosthetist have made the decision of taking this journey together as a team. Don't be too hard on yourself and understand that everyday will bring its challenges. Progress will be quicker if you see the cup as half full.

As an amputee, how can I give in the midst of something being taken from me?

You have a lot to offer others. I believe that every person possesses a physical-being and spirit-being. Even though a part of your physical-being has been taken away, your spirit-being can be fully restored and strengthened in the midst of limb loss. Your physical-being should not define you; it should simply remain a characteristic of you. An amputation really has no bearing on who you truly are as a person. Your core personality does not change. On the other hand, your spirit-being encompasses the issues of your heart, which also very much defines you. This allows you to adapt and overcome adversity in ways you never knew existed. You are an integral person with incredible willpower; who will not give up in trying times; who sees amputation as another one of life's challenges; who will use this specific challenge as a motivational tool for the benefit of others as we venture together in this journey called life!

Jonas W. Seeberg, BS, CPO, president of Real Life Prosthetics, (www.reallifeprosthetics.com) has been providing prosthetic and orthotic services for 16 years. He specializes in lower extremity prosthetics, custom silicone restoration/high-definition prosthetics, and prosthetics for athletes. He is a member of the International Society of Prosthetics and Orthotics (ISPO), American Academy of Orthotics and Prosthetics (AAOP), and the American Orthotics and Prosthetics Association (AOPA).