

LIMB LOSS

Resource GUIDE

A practical guide for
preparing for, adapting to,
and living with limb loss.



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Preparing for Amputation Surgery

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DEALING WITH AMPUTATION AND ITS AFTERMATH

As a new or prospective amputee, your mind is probably overflowing with worries and questions that you can't answer:

"What will happen to my career?"

"How will I pay my bills?"

"Will I be able to date, marry, and have children?"

"Will I always be dependent on others?"

"Will I ever be happy again?"

"Is my life over?"

That last question is perhaps the most frightening and all-consuming one. It may be difficult to accept now, but the experiences of thousands of amputees offer a strong and clear answer:

"No, your life is not over."



There is no doubt that **amputation** will have a significant impact on your life—physically, emotionally, financially, and socially. Regardless of the number of limbs you've lost and at what level, if you want to do the things you did before and live your life like you always have, you're going to have to work harder. And if you want to do new and different things—live beyond your former life—which is what many amputees choose to do, you're going to have to work *a lot harder*.

Fortunately, there are ways to help minimize the negative impact of amputation on your life. In fact, that's what this guide is all about. Throughout these pages, you will discover a wealth of information and resources to help you deal with your limb loss and regain your life.

Although it might seem unfathomable to you now, when put in difficult circumstances, human beings can be amazingly resilient. It's as if there is something dormant inside each of us that, once provoked, compels us to face adversity and say, "Just wait. I'll show you. Don't tell me what I can and can't do."

Human Resilience after Amputation



Carl Brashear, the subject of the movie *Men of Honor*, lost his left leg after a pipe struck his leg during a bomb recovery operation in 1966. In 1970, he became the U.S. Navy's first black Master Diver. Brashear used to say, "It's not a sin to get knocked down; it's a sin to stay down."



Sarah Reinertsen was born with proximal femoral focal deficiency (PFFD), a birth anomaly that most commonly involves a deformed hip and a shortened femur bone. She had her left leg amputated above the knee when she was 7 years old. In 2004, she participated in her first Ironman World Championship—a grueling 140.6-mile triathlon in Kona, Hawaii—becoming the first female leg amputee to ever attempt the race. Although she failed in her first attempt, she returned to Kona in 2005 with the motto "Unfinished Business" and became the first female leg amputee to finish the race.



Hugh Herr lost both of his legs below the knees from severe frostbite after an ice-climbing trip on New Hampshire's Mt. Washington went horribly wrong. After his amputations, Herr earned a doctorate degree from Harvard University and is now head of the Biomechatronics research group at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Media Lab. In 2011, *TIME* magazine named Herr as the "Leader of the Bionic Age" because of his work in creating bionic limbs that emulate the function of natural limbs.

These are just a few examples of the thousands of people who have gone on to live amazing lives after losing limbs.

Whether you want to explore new opportunities as an amputee, live the way you lived before, or simply get to the point where you can get out of bed in the morning, get into your wheelchair or prosthetic devices, and do basic things around the house, you should be able to do almost anything you want to do—you just might have to learn to do it in a different way.

It may not seem like it now, but your life does not have to be over because of amputation. You can instead choose to start a new one. Where you go from here is largely up to you.

7 Tips for Thriving After Amputation

- 1** Believe strongly in your potential. Limb loss does not have to prevent you from going to school, having a job, getting married, having children, participating in sports, and enjoying a full life.
- 2** Set a goal, and work toward it. Your goal can be big or small as long as it gives you something to strive for. Focus intensely on your goal, and move toward it step by step. Break large, overwhelming tasks into smaller, more manageable ones, and take them on one at a time.
- 3** Set another goal (and another, and another...). Once you've achieved your first goal (perhaps standing again), set another one (perhaps taking your first step), so you'll always have something new to achieve. As you accomplish each goal, your self-esteem will grow, motivating you to achieve even greater successes.
- 4** Accept the support of family, friends, and other amputees.
- 5** Research living with limb loss. Learn from others and be open to considering their advice.
- 6** Don't give up. If you fall or get knocked down, dust yourself off and look for alternative ways to accomplish your goals. "Fall seven times, stand up eight," advises a Japanese proverb. Even if you fall over and over, if you stand up the last time, you will ultimately succeed.
- 7** **Don't take no for an answer.**

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