

CHOOSING A PROSTHETIST*

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It is difficult, if not impossible to give you a guaranteed path to successful prosthetic service. Rather than tell you exactly where to go for it, here are some suggestions on how you can decide for yourself. You may feel that *"It's all too technical and the experts should decide,"* but from our experience we have learned that if you participate in your care, you have a better chance of good results.

Experienced amputees have found the following information useful when shopping for a prosthesis. This information is provided to help you choose the best prosthetic facility for yourself.

When interviewing a prospective prosthetist, be prepared to give the following information about yourself:

- Level, cause, and date of your amputation
- Your age, occupation, and family status
- Other health problems (circulation, skin, heart, etc.)
- What is your prosthetic prescription for, if you have one
- What are activities now and future expectations
- How prosthesis will be paid for (insurance, if any)

Location –

When choosing a prosthetic facility one of the first considerations is location. It will be necessary to return regularly for adjustments and follow-up, even after the prosthesis is delivered. The Yellow Pages list facilities in your area under "Artificial Limbs." Listings for facilities outside your area are available.

Communication –

A very important factor in choosing a prosthetist is his or her ability to understand your needs and feelings. You will need to relate subtle changes in sensation as fittings progress, so the better the prosthetist understands you, the more comfortable you will likely be.

Initial Consultation –

How much time will be allotted for an evaluation? Is there a charge for this appointment?

What to Expect –

There are several steps to prosthetic fitting. Each prospective prosthetist should explain the schedule to you even though the steps are similar for each. The greatest differences emerge after the prosthesis is dynamically aligned (the first time you walk in it). How much time will be spent adjusting the new prosthesis? Some facilities' policy will be "as long as it takes," others might say "a reasonable time." The point is to have a clear understanding before you make a decision.

Experience & Education –

How much experience does the person who would fit you have with your type of prosthesis? What is their education; and have they attended recent continuing education? This is particularly pertinent if you are a candidate for the newer techniques such as any of the ischium containing above-knee sockets or myoelectric upper extremity prosthesis.

Discussing the Options –

Every prosthesis is custom made for the individual. Part of the design involves choosing components best suited to that person's needs and circumstances. Many amputees have found it helpful to know what the options are for their type of prosthesis. The more you know about your care, the better chance you have of getting a good result. Some examples of components are: suspension systems; socket and liner materials; knee mechanisms (for above-knee amputees); rotators; feet and energy storing systems; and for upper extremity prosthesis, terminal devices (the part that replaces the hand) and control systems. Is the prosthetist willing to explain and discuss these choices?

Certification –

In most states, prosthetists are not licensed like doctors or nurses are, but they and their facilities can be certified by the American Board for Certification (ABC). The ABC is the national organization formed by prosthetists to set and maintain their professional standards.

To be certified by the ABC, the individual prosthetist must meet established educational criteria (including continuing education) and pass rigorous written, oral, and practical tests administered by their peers. For a facility (place of business) to be certified, there must be at least one certified practitioner available. Also it must meet standards relating to accommodations such as wheelchair access, private fitting areas, separation of workshop and patient areas, etc. For further information, write to: The American Board of Certification, 1650 King Street, Suite 500, Alexandria, VA 22314.

Payment –

You should make all financial arrangements before letting anyone start work for you. This includes the schedule for any payment you are responsible for. If you are paying for all or part of your prosthesis, price may be an issue. In order to compare prices, it is necessary to understand the service and component options included in each proposed price. Insurance coverage varies, so ask the prosthetist at the initial consultation what his or her practice is with your type of insurance. If you have some form of private insurance, it will probably be your responsibility to determine what the coverage for prosthetic service is. It may be useful to show your insurance company your prescription and proposed fee to assure their payment later.

Additional Services –

What other services and referrals are provided that may improve your life as an amputee? Possibilities include gait training, support groups, counseling, sports groups, pain clinics or guidance in such areas as nutrition and weight control.

Availability –

What are the hours of business? Are evening or weekend appointments available? What about emergencies?

At your first appointment it will be helpful to:

- Arrive wearing a compressive cover (ace wrap or shrinker sock) on your residual limb or wear your prosthesis, if you have one
- Bring the shoes you normally wear
- Bring shorts (for a lower limb prosthesis) or if you are a female with an upper extremity prosthesis, bring a "tube top" or similar garment. This makes working with you easier and affords you some modesty
- If X-rays are requested, bring them.

You may want to make a checklist of the factors that seem most important to you so that you can write down the information for each prosthetist you consider.

We hope this information proves useful to you. If you have suggestions or comments, please write or call MAAF at 877/267-8828

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