

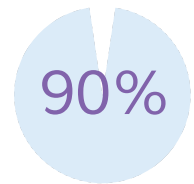
Fact Sheet

Amputee Pain

About

Each year, approximately 185,000 Americans undergo amputation of a limb and about 1,000 children are born with a limb difference. In fact, it was estimated that nearly 2 million people in this country are living with the absence or loss of a limb.¹ Amputees face a number of pain issues from phantom limb pain, to pain from prosthetic devices to chronic low back pain.

Peripheral arterial disease (PAD) is the leading cause of amputation in people age 50 and older, and accounts for up to 90% of amputations overall. In PAD, the blood vessels in limbs become damaged because of hardening of the arteries or diabetes. If blood vessels are unable to supply blood and oxygen to your fingers or toes, the cells and tissues die and are vulnerable to infection. If the blood supply cannot be improved sufficiently or if the tissue is beyond salvage, extensive tissue death may require amputation, especially if a person is experiencing severe pain or infection.²



PAD accounts for up to 90% of amputations overall.

“ Six months post amputation surgery, 78.8% of amputees experienced phantom limb pain and 51.2% experienced stump pain.⁵ ”

Phantom-limb pain highlights the differences between two major kinds of pain. The first is pain related to a specifiable injury or disease, which stimulates specific receptors and spinal pathways to the brain. The second is severe chronic pain, which is usually out of proportion to an injury or other pathology and persists long after healing is complete. The evidence that excruciating pain may be felt in the phantom half of the

body after a total break in the spinal cord tells us that the brain does more than detect and analyze sensory inputs; it creates perceptual experience even in the absence of external inputs. We do not need a body to feel a body or a physical injury to feel pain.³

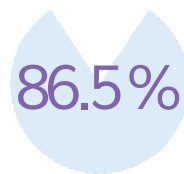
Facts

Pain, whether in the amputated limb or in another area of the body such as the back or the nonamputated limb, can lead to limitations in activity and result in further disability. Over three-fourths of people who participated in the Amputee Coalition of America (ACA) survey (83%) experienced pain in two or more body areas. Most of those surveyed (91%) said they have some type of pain.⁴

Almost 70% of all those surveyed said that they had residual limb pain (pain in the part of the limb that is still present). People with trauma-related amputations were 1.5 times more likely to experience residual limb pain than those with vascular-related amputations, after adjusting for age, time since amputation, and chronic disease.⁴



When asked to rate the intensity of their residual limb pain on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being extremely mild pain and 10 being extremely intense pain, the average intensity reported was 5.1.



When asked if they were bothered by their pain, 86.5% reported being bothered, with one-third of those being “extremely” bothered.⁴

Phantom pain (pain in the part of the limb that is missing), was reported by 80% of amputees. Similar to residual limb pain, the likelihood of experiencing phantom pain did not vary by time since amputation. There was no difference in the number reporting phantom pain across cause after adjusting for age, time since amputation, and chronic disease.⁴

When asked to rate the intensity of their phantom limb pain on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being mild pain and 10 being extremely intense pain,

the average intensity reported was 5.5. When asked if they were not bothered, somewhat bothered, or extremely bothered by their phantom pain, 81% reported being bothered, with about one-third (27%) of those being “extremely” bothered.⁴

Nearly half (49%) of all amputees surveyed reported experiencing pain in their nonamputated limb. The presence of nonamputated limb pain varied by cause of amputation, with cancer-related and traumatic amputees less likely to experience pain in the nonamputated limb than those who had vascular-related amputations, after adjusting for age and time since amputation.⁴

When asked to rate the intensity of their pain for the non-amputated limb on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being extremely mild pain and 10 being extremely intense pain, the average intensity reported was 5.1. When asked if they were bothered by their nonamputated limb pain, 88.3% reported being bothered, with slightly less than one-third of those being “extremely” bothered.⁴

Back pain affected 62% of those surveyed. Back pain did not vary by the cause of the amputation nor by the time elapsed since the amputation. More than three-fourths of respondents were bothered by their back pain, with one-third of those reporting being “extremely” bothered.⁴

A separate study showed that six months post amputation surgery, 78.8% of amputees experienced phantom limb pain and 51.2% experienced stump pain (pain where the limb was severed).⁵

In another study, above the knee amputees (transfemoral) were more likely to suffer from back pain (81%) than below the knee (transtibial) amputees (62%). Of those suffering from severe back pain, 89% and 81% also suffered from severe pain in the phantom limb and severe stump pain respectively.⁶

One month after amputation, greater levels of perceived social support were related to lower levels of pain interference and greater levels of life satisfaction and mobility. In addition, greater social integration was associated with greater occupation function. The fact that persons with greater perceived social support reported less pain interference and greater satisfaction with life may suggest that facilitating, enhancing, or providing quality social support immediately after the amputation may effect well-being by distracting the individual from pain and focusing attention on more positive, satisfying aspects of life.⁷

Additional Resources

Amputee Coalition of America

900 East Hill Avenue, Suite 205
Knoxville, Tennessee 37915-2566
Phone: (888) 267- 5669
Fax: (865) 525-7917
www.amputee-coalition.org/

Disabled American Veterans

3725 Alexandria Pike
Cold Spring, KY 41076
Phone: 877-I AM A Vet (877-426-2838)
www.dav.org

National Amputation Foundation

40 Church Street
Malverne, NY 11565
Phone: (516) 887-3600
Fax: (516) 887-3667
E-mail: amps76@aol.com
www.nationalamputation.org

Resources verified July 2011.

References

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