

The Road to Recovery

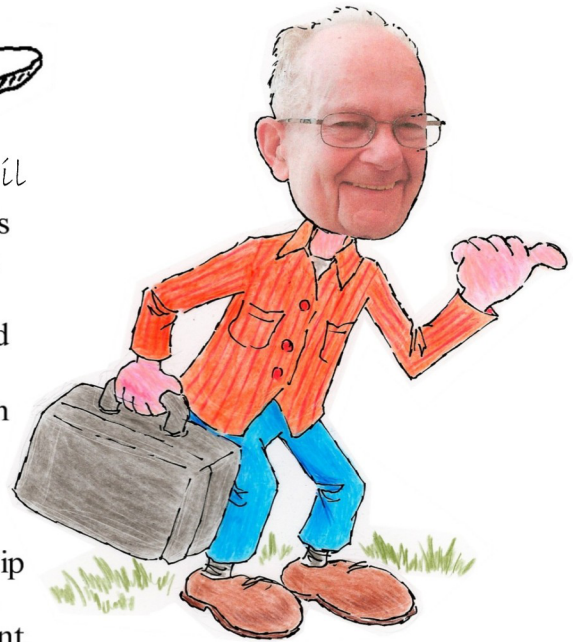
by Jack O'Neill

One of the hardest decisions for an individual to make is having a limb amputated. Few people have the decision made for them since most are required to give their consent. Once made there is usually a sense of relief and one can plan for the future. Most people measure their lives by the clock and the calendar and look for a certain number of days, weeks, or months when evaluating progress in their healing. Saying that "everyone is different" is sometimes hard to accept. The milestones along the road to recovery and anticipation makes the trip seem longer than it actually is. There are no timeframes for reaching each milestone because everyone is different.

Progress starts with getting out of bed the day after surgery. Moving from the bed to a chair can be painful, but it is an important step. While in the hospital you learn to walk with a walker or other device. You may feel uncomfortable when visited by family and friends. Your residual limb may be painful and you may need assistance. It is sometimes hard for family and friends to find a balance between being helpful and being a bother. Sometimes using the right words in a conversation may be awkward. Being visited by a peer visitor or another amputee can be helpful in the recovery process.

Exercise will be a critical step in your recovery to increase your cardiovascular endurance, strength and balance. It is through walking and standing that you will become prepared for your prosthetic fitting. You will notice that getting around and going places will be less demanding as you progress. Compression dressings help to create a stable limb and reduce swelling. Your prosthetist may become a lifetime caregiver. Ask questions regarding prosthesis components and options. Once you receive your prosthesis you may feel that your life may be whole again. You will now be able to walk. Time and practice will result in being more skilled in using your prosthesis. Prosthetic training takes time. Having a physical or occupational therapist is important in learning to increase your functional ability.

A significant milestone will be reached when you can return to work and enjoy leisure activities even though some accommodations may have to be made. Don't become impatient by being too focused on the milestones along the road to recovery. Look back and see what you have accomplished and you will find that you are farther along than you thought.



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