

# Prosthetics & Orthotics Awareness Quarterly: Vol.3 Sept 2009

By Mitchell Prosthetics & Orthotics – Serving Duncan, Nanaimo, Comox

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## **AMPUTEE MANAGEMENT AT ANY AGE**

**A MAJOR LIMB AMPUTATION ONCE MEANT THE END OF AN ACTIVE, ENJOYABLE LIFESTYLE. PROSTHESES WERE PROVIDED TO PHYSICALLY FIT, YOUNGER, WORKING PEOPLE WHO HAD THE PHYSICAL RESERVES AND DETERMINATION TO UTILIZE THEM.**

**MODERN PROSTHETICS HAS ENABLED THE FITTING OF UNHEALTHY, FRAGILE, GERIATRIC AMPUTEES AND GIVEN THEM THE OPPORTUNITY TO LIVE INDEPENDENT DIGNIFIED LIVES. CERTIFIED PROSTHETISTS ARE TRAINED AND QUALIFIED TO DESIGN AND MAINTAIN A FUNCTIONAL AND HEALTHY PROSTHESIS.**

Amputees that run, climb, surf, skydive, wakeboard, etc. can often be seen on news or sports shows, impressing the viewer with their abilities and technology.

This shapes many people's perception of amputees as an active, healthy, younger crowd.

The understanding is that the limb loss would have been secondary to a trauma such as a motorcycle or logging accident or perhaps military service.

While trauma is a common cause of limb loss, it only accounts for about 25% of leg amputations. True, typically those affected are younger, healthier and more active than those who lose a limb to disease. By comparison, roughly 3 out of 4 lower limb amputees will have lost their legs to peripheral vascular disease secondary to



**82-year-old Art still enjoys a variety of activities!**



diabetes and generally poor health. Most of these patients are in their 60s or upwards and may also be living with other age-related ailments.

With today's booming elderly population, facing life with an untreated amputation would be extremely devastating. The amputee would lose his or her independence, and dignity and may become depressed and sedentary.

Fortunately, modern materials in the hands of the experienced and well-trained professional can enable the prosthetic fitting of even fragile amputees. Light-weight energy

storing feet and gel liners that absorb shear forces and distribute pressures enable the fitting of those with fragile skin, poor circulation and minimal strength.

The Prosthetist must also be aware of the patient's reduced cardio-vascular

reserves, poorer balance, limited proprioception

and reaction time and often reduced cognitive ability to judge and manage the wear of the artificial limb.

Despite the physical setbacks that come with advancing age, modern prosthetic science has given us tools to successfully fit older, frailer patients, enabling them to fish, shop, golf or just use the bathroom independently. Thanks to advances in technology there are more older amputees "on the road" (beach, golf course, garden path) than ever before.

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