

Factsheet

Limb Difference/ Amputee



The information is provided for guidance only, allowing you to be more informed in your approach to being a more inclusive coach. No two people are the same, as such, please ensure your first step is to speak directly to the person understand their abilities and goals and never assume.

What is Amputation?

Limb difference may be present from birth (congenital) or acquired later in life as a result of injury, illness, or surgery. It can involve the absence of all or part of a limb, such as an arm or leg. People with limb difference have a wide range of experiences and bring diverse strengths and abilities to sport and physical activity.

It is important to understand the following points:

Every individual's experience of limb difference is unique. Ability and participation can vary depending on factors such as the level and number of limb differences, overall health, comfort, use of prosthetics, and personal experience in movement and sport. Many people develop highly effective movement strategies and can participate fully and successfully across a range of activities.

Movement patterns may differ, particularly for those using prosthetic limbs. For example, individuals with a lower-limb difference may generate movement more from the hips or upper body rather than the ankle joint. These are natural and effective adaptations that support balance, mobility, and performance in sport.

Pain Threshold and Tolerance

Coaches should discuss pain threshold and tolerance with the individual to understand their needs, including any pain management strategies (e.g. medication). This should be reviewed regularly to reduce the risk of aggravating existing issues or causing injury, and adjustments made where needed.

Phantom Limb Pain and Sensation

Phantom limb pain (PLP) is common in people with amputations. It refers to real pain felt in the part of the limb that is no longer there. Sensations can include burning, twisting, itching, or pressure, and may vary between individuals.

What We May See When Coaching With People Who Have Limb Difference or an Amputation

Prosthetic limbs are designed to replicate function in a simplified way. Start with your usual coaching methods and adapt as needed.

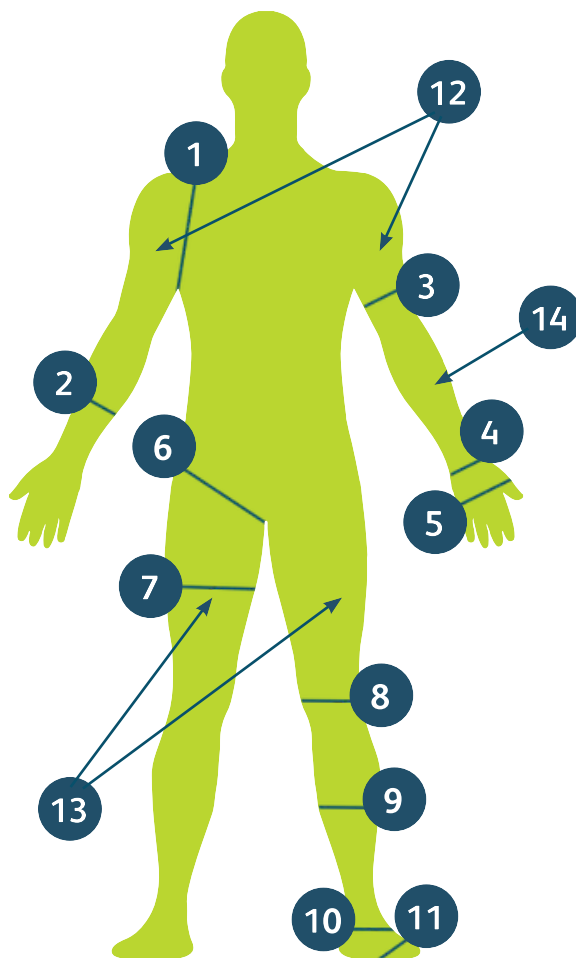
- Let the participant guide you most know what works, what causes discomfort, and what adaptations they need
- Assess balance, coordination, and strength before introducing sport-specific skills
- Prostheses can be used for most activity specialist blades are not always required, though some may feel heavier or limit performance; encourage discussion with a prosthetist
- If limited by a prosthesis, adapt activities (e.g. seated or floor-based options)
- Be mindful of socket fit heat, sweat, and swelling can cause discomfort or skin issues; allow breaks if needed
- Identify any barriers to participation (e.g. confidence, pain, fit, or equipment)
- Consider the individual's body, mobility, and goals regularly check in on preferences and ability
- Range of movement can vary assess and adapt accordingly
- Repetition can support skill development but may increase risk of skin breakdown balance load and variation
- Movement initiation may be slower due to prosthetic use
- Focus on developing fundamental movement skills where restrictions are present
- Adapt drills and gameplay to account for any balance or coordination challenges
- Prioritise safety and comfort at all times



Levels of Amputation

Mobility, range of movement, coordination, balance and comfort vary greatly depending on the level of amputation. As a general rule, the more residual limb (stump length) an amputee has, the more mobile they will be.

1. Shoulder disarticulation / forequarter
2. Above elbow
3. Below elbow
4. Wrist disarticulation
5. Partial hand or finger(s)
6. Hip disarticulation / hemipelvectomy
7. Transfemoral (above knee)
8. Knee disarticulation (through knee)
9. Transtibial (below knee)
10. Syme's (through ankle)
11. Partial foot or toe(s)
12. Bilateral upper-limb absence
13. Bilateral lower-limb absence
14. Elbow disarticulation



For further information and support:
Please visit www.amputee.ie
or www.nrh.ie