

What are the main differences between amputation and limb preservation?

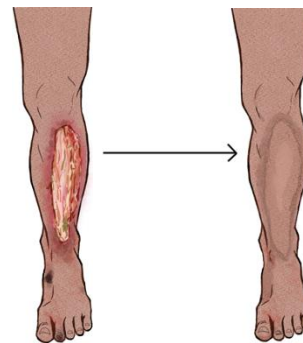
There are two basic options when you have a severe wound of the leg or foot



Remove the wounded part of the limb
(Amputation)



Have surgeries to try to save it
(Limb Preservation Surgery)

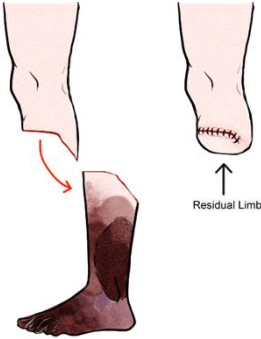
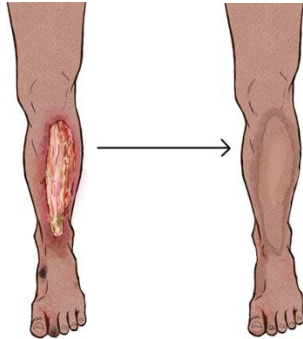
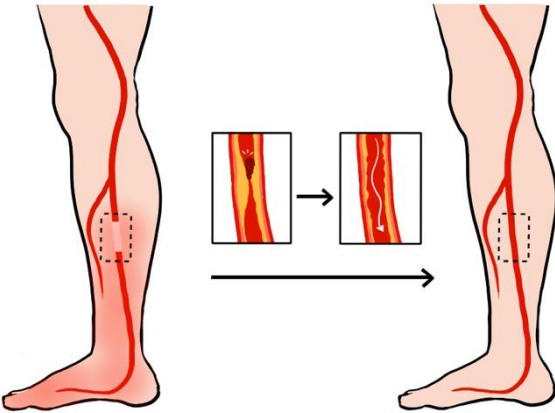


- Not everyone has a choice. Sometimes the wound is too severe or too big to save the limb. Other times, a patient is too ill to go through limb preservation surgeries.
- There are a lot of things to think about that are unique to you that might lead you to choose one or the other.
- You should talk to your surgeon about your unique case, and think through your options. Remember, neither choice is right or wrong choice.

This guide will help you start to think about your choice.

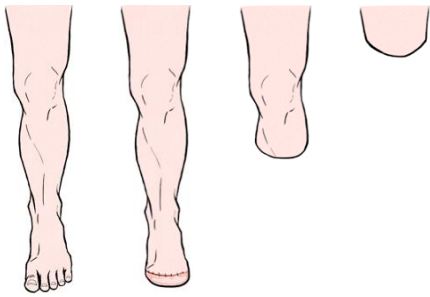
- You do not have to make a choice right now.
- Your surgeon will help you talk through the choice.
- After speaking with the surgeon, you will be given a longer guide with more details that you might want to know to make a good choice.

What are the main differences between amputation and limb preservation?

Amputation: The Facts	Limb Preservation Surgery: The Facts
<p>An amputation is the surest way to remove and fix the problem long-term</p> 	<p>Limb preservation is the only way to save the foot or leg. It is surgery to rebuild the limb.</p> 
<p>It is just <u>1</u> surgery that can provide an end to the problem right away. However, there is no going back from an amputation. It will change the way you walk.</p> <p>Even though the goal is to end the problem with one surgery, amputation surgeries can have complications like any other surgery. If a complication occurs, it may result in a new problem with the leg.</p>	<p>Limb preservation might mean having a number of surgeries to get to the final result. Common reasons that more than 1 surgery is needed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An infection forms or gets worse • To improve blood flow to the wound 
<p>The goal of an amputation is to let you move on with your life and, hopefully, get back to walking.</p>	<p>The goal of limb preservation is to get you back to where you were before the wound started and try to get it back to normal, or as close as possible.</p>

What are the main differences between amputation and limb preservation?

There are different levels of amputation. Having an amputation does not necessarily mean you lose your whole leg. It might be just a part of the foot, or it could be further up the leg. It depends on how bad the wound is and your ability to heal.



There are different types of surgery needed for limb preservation. Every patient's wound and health are different. So different things need to be done to fix them. The process always starts with debridement – surgery to get rid of infected tissue.



What are the main differences between amputation and limb preservation?

Walking with an amputation requires a prosthetic leg or foot (artificial leg or foot) when the amputation takes off the whole foot.

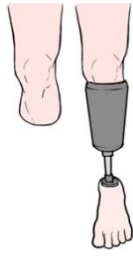
The limb has to heal before you can get a prosthetic.

Prosthetic legs have to be custom made. Technology has come a long way, and some people can even run and do sports with a prosthetic leg.

Like anything, they can break, need fixing, or need to be replaced over time.



No prosthetic needed at this level



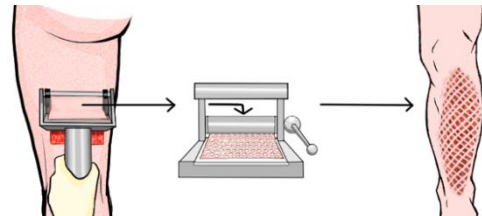
Residual limb + fitted prosthetic



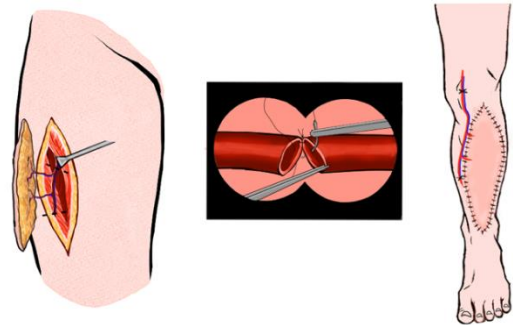
Residual limb + fitted prosthetic

After debridement, skin grafts or flaps are used to cover the wound. Your surgeon will need to explain these to you and direct the process.

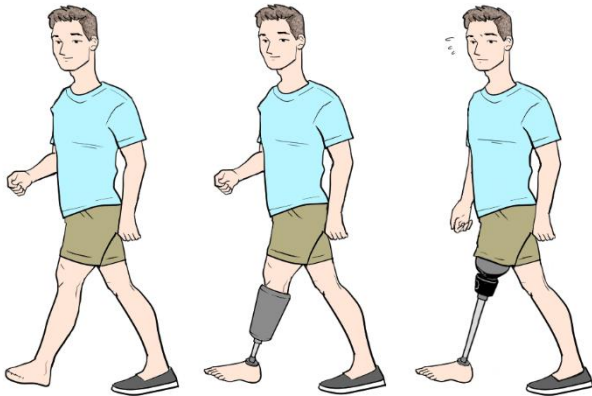
In a skin graft, a *very thin layer* of skin is shaved off the leg and set on the wound. The area where it came from is like a carpet burn, and heals on its own. Skin grafts fix every type of wound. It depends on how bad the wound is.



In a flap or free flap, normal skin or muscle is moved to cover the problem area. The quality of the covering is better than a skin graft, but the surgery is more complicated. The flap has to be connected to the blood vessels in your leg or foot. Flaps can cover almost any type of wound. But sometimes there are problems that be fixed just by "covering" the wound.



After amputation, you need about 2 days of bed rest. Some people can walk with prosthetics and some can't.



After limb preservation surgery, you may need up to 5 days of bed rest to help the flap or graft heal.



What are the main differences between amputation and limb preservation?



Both surgeries will mean time off of walking while you heal

How long will I have to stay off my leg or foot?

With amputation, you will need to stay off of the leg or foot for at least 6 weeks, and sometimes longer.

- The limb has to be healed all the way before it can withstand your body weight, or the stitches will break open and cause a wound.
- All of the swelling from surgery has to come down in order to get a proper fit with your prosthetic leg (if you are getting one).

This time off walking can make people’s muscles weak.

How long does it take to heal from an amputation?

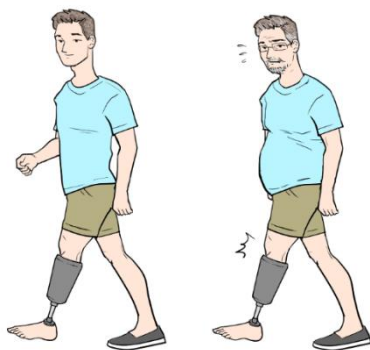
In the ideal scenario:

- Stitches come out in 3 weeks
- The skin is healed enough in 6 weeks to start getting fit for a prosthetic leg
- You get the leg at about 8 weeks and then start learning to walk with it.

But this time course varies a lot from person to person.

Will I be able to walk after amputation?

Whether you can walk afterwards depends on a lot of things, but mostly how fit you are now and how much of the leg is removed.



How long will I have to stay off my leg or foot?

With limb preservation, you will need to stay off of the leg or foot while it heals, from 3 – 12 weeks.

- If the wound was on the leg, you can usually walk once stitches come out – around 3 weeks.
- If the wound was on the foot, it has to heal all the way before you can walk on it. This takes at least 6 weeks, but can be up to 12 weeks in people with diabetes or poor blood flow.

This time off walking can make people’s muscles weak.

How long does it take to heal from limb preservation?

- Stitches come out in 3 weeks
- The rest of the healing process is highly variable between patients depending on how sick they are and what exactly needed to be done

With limb preservation surgery, you might need more than one surgery after “the big surgery” to make things perfect or functional.

Will I be able to walk after limb preservation surgery?

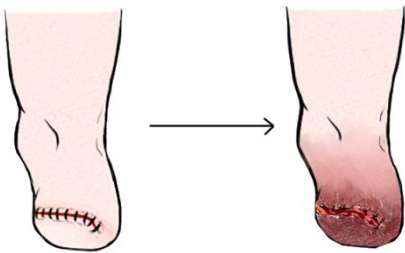
- If you could walk before the wound happened, you should be able to walk after limb preservation surgery heals.
- Depending on how much damage was done to the limb by the wound, it is possible that it won’t function as well as it did before, or could be stiff or painful. This varies a lot from person to person.
- Sometimes, for people who could not walk before the surgery, the goal is to keep the leg long enough that they can transfer themselves in and out of a wheelchair or get around with a walker.

What are the main differences between amputation and limb preservation?

The information above assumes everything turns out perfectly. But what kinds of things can go wrong with an amputation?

Amputations sometimes have trouble healing. This depends on a lot of things, but if it doesn't heal right, it may be months before you can walk or you might need another surgery.

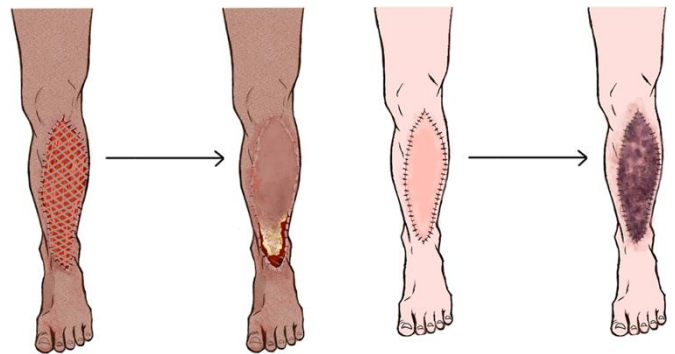
Some patients will accidentally lose their balance. Falling can cause the wound to open up or cause other injuries.



Wound dehiscence or delayed wound healing may occur

The information above assumes everything turns out perfectly. But what kinds of things can go wrong with limb preservation surgery?

Sometimes, skin grafts or flaps “don't take.” In that case, you might need more surgery.



Delayed wound healing or partial skin graft loss may occur

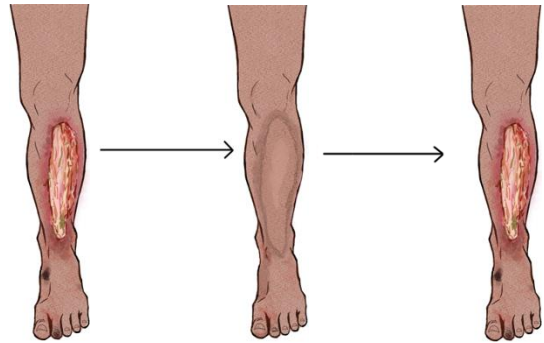
If a clot interrupts the blood flow to the flap, it can die

What are the main differences between amputation and limb preservation?

Some people who have an amputation will develop chronic pain. This could be “nerve pain,” “phantom pain,” or pain from the cut bones. Some people have pain when they try to use their prosthetic leg.



If the flap or graft succeeds in fixing the wound, people need to be careful to protect it. If people do not take care of themselves, the wound might come back for the same reasons it started in the first place. So, undergoing limb preservation surgery may not be a good option for those who will have trouble caring for it afterwards.



Limb Preservation Program

What are the main differences between amputation and limb preservation?

Some people who have an amputation may never walk again, or may only be able to walk a few steps at a time.

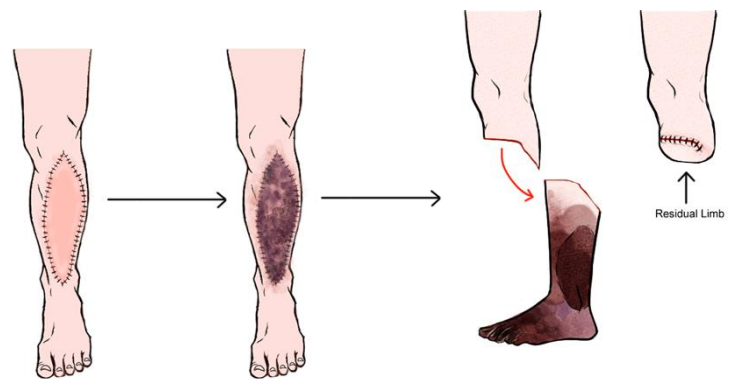
Some people, such as those with weak hands or bad eyesight, may have difficulty putting on and taking off the prosthetic leg or foot.

If this is the case, it can mean relying on others to help care for you.



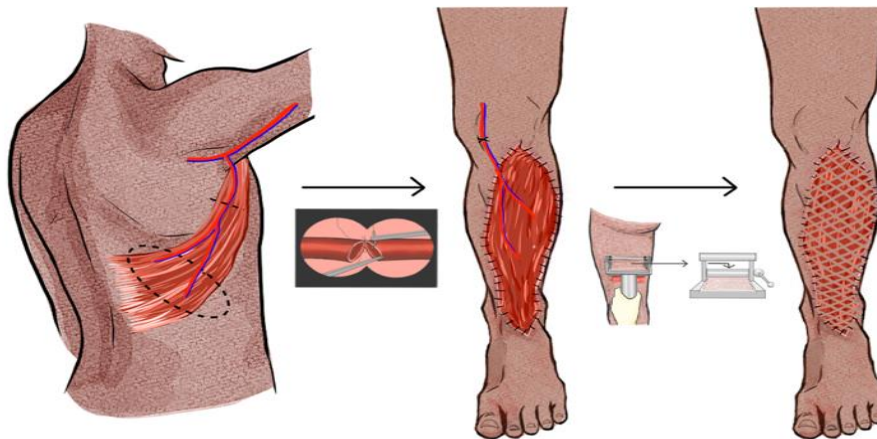
At times, no matter how hard we try or how good your surgeon is, limb preservation surgery just doesn't work. In that case, amputation might be the only option to try, after you have tried to save the limb.

The risk of limb preservation not working is related to how severe other health issues are. Your surgeon can give you an estimate of your chances of success. In some cases, the chance of success is up to 95%. In other cases, it could be less than 50%.



If a clot interrupts the blood flow to the flap, it can die

Your feelings are the biggest part of the choice. You have time to make a choice. Talk to your surgeon and think about this information. You can read a more detailed guide after talking to your surgeon.



Coverage may consist of a skin flap, or a healthy muscle flap followed by skin graft