



O&P Risk Advisor

RISK MANAGEMENT NEWSLETTER FOR THE ORTHOTICS & PROSTHETICS BUSINESS OWNER

Details count in sock management

In the big picture of fitting a prosthetic device and teaching patients, it's easy to lose sight of an important detail—sock management. Not wearing the right socks puts a patient at risk for skin irritation and breakdown.

If you didn't document that you taught the patient proper technique—or failed to complete an assessment of the limb at follow-up visits—you could be liable in a court case should an injury occur. Here's how to protect yourself and your patient.

The right sock

Instruct patients to wear the proper prosthetic socks over the residual limb to ensure a snug fit. The right socks provide a cushion, wick away perspiration (in suction or vacuum suspension prostheses, they wick air out of the system), and reduce shear that can cause skin tears.

Socks are made from wool, cotton, polyester, or blends. They can be cut if needed to the proper length. The thickness ("ply") of the socks compensate for volume changes (shrinking or swelling) in the residual limb. Several plys are available, with the most common being 1-, 3-, and 5-ply.

Patients should always know the ply of their socks and be taught how to adjust thickness as needed. If the prosthetic socket is too loose, the patient should add a ply; if too tight, the ply should be reduced.

At first, patients may need to change socks several times a day to accommodate limb volume changes. Volume changes occur most frequently during the first 6 months after limb loss.

It's best for patients to wear the least number

Enough or too much?

Wearing the correct sock ply is a balancing act.

Signs of not enough sock ply include

- any kind of pain on the bottom part of the residual limb
- a feeling that the prosthesis is too "short" or too "loose."

Signs of too many socks include

- stubbing the toe
- a feeling that the prosthesis is too "long" or "too tight."

Source: Yanke J, Goszkowski PH. Handbook for New Amputees. <http://shoreprosthetics.com/toknow.html>.

of socks needed. For example, it's better to use one 5-ply sock instead of one 3-ply and two 1-ply socks. Wearing too many socks can make the prosthesis unstable and create pressure over bony prominences.

Patients can add socks to a combined thickness of 5- to 15-ply before a new socket, socket adjustment, or a soft insert is needed because of fit problems, according to the book *Prosthetics and Patient Management: A Comprehensive Clinical Approach* by Kevin Carroll and Joan Edelstein (Slack Incorporated). Other experts say 10-ply is a sign that modification is needed.

Getting dressed

Advise patients to pull on their socks tightly to avoid wrinkles, which create pressure on the skin. Sometimes a nylon sheath is applied as the first layer to reduce friction. The thickest sock or sometimes a silicon or urethane liner follows the sheath.

If a locking liner with a pin is used, the patient will need to wear a sock with a hole to accommodate the pin; the sock should completely clear the pin to avoid interference with the locking mechanism.

Patients should change socks every day or more often if they become moist. Socks should be washed in mild soap and water, and then rinsed, per manufacturer's directions. Socks should be dried flat, not in a dryer. Tell patients to replace socks that are torn or worn thin.

Documentation

You may want to have the patient practice choosing and putting on socks while you watch. Document what you teach—and any return demonstration—in the patient's medical record.

Don't forget to note if you provided written patient education, and be sure it's at a reading level appropriate for the patient.

Follow up

At each visit, assess the patient's understanding of how to use socks and document the condition of the residual limb without socks on. If the patient complains of new pain, be aware that it may be caused by wearing too many or too few socks.

Your close attention to detail can save your patient discomfort and save you the distress of a malpractice suit.

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