

AMPUTEE GLOSSARY

Prosthetics industry jargon can be confusing. This resource is a list of commonly used terms in the prosthetics industry.

Above Knee (AK) amputation: amputation of the leg through the thigh bone (femur) above the knee joint. Also referred to as a transfemoral (TF) amputation.

Alignment: the position of the prosthetic socket with respect to the foot and the knee.

Anterior: the front surface of a biologic structure.

Bilateral amputee: person with an amputation of both the right and the left limb.

Below Knee (BK) amputation: amputation of the leg through the tibia and fibula below the knee joint. Also referred to as a transtibial (TT) amputation.

Check socket (also known as a test socket): a temporary socket that is used for assessing proper fit; it is often transparent so that the prosthetist can see how the tissue is pressing against the socket wall.

Cosmesis: the outer covering of a prosthesis or prosthetic component that helps to provide a more natural appearance.
Disarticulation: an amputation of a limb through the joint (hip, knee, ankle, shoulder, elbow, or wrist), without cutting any bone.

Distal: the end that is farthest from the central portion of the body (example: the wrist is distal to the elbow)

Doffing: taking a prosthesis off

Donning: putting a prosthesis on

Dorsiflexion: Pointing the toes/foot upward, toward the body.

Durometer: refers to the hardness of rubber-type products, such as the bumpers that control the amount of motion in a single axis foot.

Endoskeletal prosthesis: the weight of the prosthesis is carried through a center tube or rod (“pylon”), with connectors or adapters at each end.

Energy storing foot: a prosthetic foot that stores energy when load is applied to it and releases energy when the load is removed. The released energy helps to propel the foot forward. Energy storing capability is also referred to as “energy return.”

Ertl procedure: a type of amputation surgery that focuses on reconstructing the bone, muscle, nerves, etc. to create a pain-free limb that resists rotation and has the potential for end weight bearing. In a transtibial amputation, this involves the attachment of a “bone bridge” between the tibia and fibula.

Eversion: Turning outward. For a foot, this means that the foot angles outward with the sole of the foot increasingly facing away from the other foot.

Exoskeletal prosthesis: the weight of the prosthesis is carried through the outside wall of a hollow shank that is shaped like a natural limb.

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Extension: straightening a joint to make the angle between two bones larger (example: when you straighten your legs, the knees undergo extension).

Extension assist: a feature that helps a knee to swing forward more quickly.

Flexible keel foot: a prosthetic foot that deforms while walking but does not store energy.

Flexion: bending a joint to make the angle between two bones smaller (example: when you touch your right shoulder with your right hand, your elbow is in flexion)

Friction-controlled knee: the rate at which the knee swings forward and backward is controlled by mechanical friction. Knees controlled this way can only accommodate a single walking speed.

Functional levels: a rating system used in the United States by Medicare to predict the activity level you're most likely to achieve with a prosthetic device, so that the device that they pay for will meet your needs and potential. Also known as activity levels.

Gait: a person's manner of walking.

Heel compression: a feature of prosthetic feet that provides some shock absorption when the heel contacts the ground. Heel strike: the moment when the heel makes contact with the floor

Hip Disarticulation (HD) amputation: an amputation through the hip joint.

Hydraulically-controlled knee: the rate at which the knee swings forward and backward is controlled by a piston moving in a liquid-filled chamber. Knees controlled this way are able to accommodate a range of walking speeds.

Inversion: turning inward. For a foot, this means that the foot angles inward so that the sole of the foot increasingly faces the opposite foot.

Keel: the main structural component of a prosthetic foot.

Knee Disarticulation (KD) amputation: an amputation through the knee joint.

Lateral: away from the midline (center line) of the body (example: the pinky toe is on the lateral side of the foot)
L-Codes: billing codes used in the O&P industry to identify the type of device that was provided; each code is a 4-digit number preceded by the letter "L"

Liner: a sock-shaped product made of gel, silicone, or urethane, which may have a fabric covering, that is worn directly against the skin of the residual limb to provide comfort, protection, and in some cases suspension.

Locking suspension: a method of holding the prosthesis onto the limb in which a pin on the end of a liner attaches to a locking device in the socket.

Medial: toward the midline (center line) of the body (example: the big toe is medial to the 5th toe).

Multiaxial: type of foot/ankle that allows inversion, eversion, dorsiflexion, and plantarflexion; effective for walking on uneven surfaces.

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Orthosis: a device that straightens and/or supports a body part.

Orthotics: the profession of providing devices to support and straighten the body

Orthotist: the healthcare professional who designs, fits, and adjusts the orthosis. Certification of orthotists varies by country; in the United States, an orthotist who has met the certification requirements of the ABC (American Board for Certification) is a Certified Orthotist (CO), and an orthotist who has met the certification requirements of the Board of Certification (BOC) is a BOC Orthotist (BOCO). An orthotist who is also certified in Prosthetics is a Certified Prosthetist Orthotist (CPO) or a BOC Prosthetist Orthotist (BOCPO).

Patella: Bone which is referred to as the kneecap

Pistoning: a residual limb moving up and down in a socket like a piston.

Plantarflexion: pointing the toes/foot down, away from the body.

Pneumatically-controlled knee: the rate at which the knee swings forward and backward is controlled by a piston moving in an air-filled chamber. Knees controlled this way are able to accommodate a range of walking speeds.

Polycentric Knee: a knee with a sliding motion that is more similar to the function of the human knee than a simple Single Axis Knee.

Posterior: the rear surface of a biologic structure.

Prosthesis: an artificial substitute for a part of the body that is missing.

Prosthetics: the profession of providing functional and/or cosmetic restoration of missing or underdeveloped body parts

Prosthetist: the healthcare professional who designs, fits, and adjusts the prosthesis. Certification of prosthetists varies by country; in the United States, a prosthetist who has met the certification requirements of the ABC (American Board for Certification) is a Certified Prosthetist (CP), and a prosthetist who has met the certification requirements of the Board of Certification (BOC) is a BOC Prosthetist (BOCP). A prosthetist who is also certified in Orthotics is a Certified Prosthetist Orthotist (CPO) or a BOC Prosthetist Orthotist (BOCPO).

Proximal: closer to the central portion of the body (example: the hip is proximal to the knee).

Pylon: the tube or rod that connects the socket or knee to the foot in an endoskeletal prosthesis.

Residual limb: the portion of a limb that remains after an amputation; sometimes also referred to as a “stump.”

SACH (Solid Ankle Cushioned Heel) foot: the most basic, affordable type of prosthetic foot. The only functions it provides are stability and some cushioning when the heel contacts the ground.

Single axis foot: a foot with an ankle hinge that allows the toe to point up or down shin to move forwards or backwards

Single axis knee: a basic knee that acts like a simple hinge.

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Socket: the part of a prosthesis that is custom-made to fit the residual limb and to which prosthetic components are attached.

Stance control: a type of knee that resists bending when weight is placed on it.

Stance flexion: a feature of some knees that provides some shock absorption at heel strike.

Stance phase: the period of time when a person is walking when the foot is on the ground, supporting the body's weight.
Suction suspension: a method of holding the prosthesis onto the limb in which air is forced out of the prosthesis through a one-way valve in the socket.

Suspension: The method of holding the prosthesis on to the body.

Swing phase: the period of time when a person is walking when the foot is off the ground.

Symes amputation: an amputation through the ankle joint; instead of being referred to as an ankle disarticulation, though, it's named for Dr. James Syme, the surgeon who first performed this type of surgery.

Test socket (also known as a check socket): a temporary socket that is used for assessing proper fit; it is often transparent so that the prosthetist can see how the tissue is pressing against the socket wall.

Toe off: the final period of stance phase, just before the foot swings backward.

Total surface weight bearing: a type of prosthetic socket design in which weight is born across the entire surface of the residual limb, as opposed to other socket designs where specific areas bear the majority of the weight and other areas bear no weight at all.

Transfemoral (TF) amputation: amputation of the leg above the knee joint. Also referred to as a Above Knee (AK) amputation.

Transtibial (TT) amputation: amputation below the knee through the tibia and fibula bones. Also referred to as a Below Knee (BK) amputation.

Unilateral amputee: person with an amputation of either the right or left limb

Vertical shock absorption: a feature of some feet and pylons that allows them to shorten when the foot contacts the ground, in order to reduce the force that is applied to the limb with each step.

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