

# Phantom Pain



The word phantom means something that you can feel but cannot see. After a part of the body, like an arm or leg is amputated by an accident or from surgery, the person sometimes feels that the arm or leg is still there. This is called phantom sensation. If the person has pain as though the arm or leg is still there, it is called phantom pain.

- The cause of phantom pain is not known but it probably happens because the nerves in the body are still telling the brain that the arm or leg is still there.
- Phantom pain is very real but not everyone who has an amputation has phantom pain.
- Phantom pain can be cramping, burning, stabbing or shooting pain.
- Phantom pain usually gets better over time.
- Some things that can make phantom pain worse:
  - ▶ Being too tired
  - ▶ Too much pressure on the part of the arm or leg that is left
  - ▶ Changes in the weather
  - ▶ Stress
  - ▶ Infection
  - ▶ An artificial limb that does not fit properly
  - ▶ Poor circulation
  - ▶ Swelling
- Some things you can do that might help make phantom pain better:
  - ▶ Take medicines that your doctor orders
  - ▶ Keep the remaining part of the arm or leg warm
  - ▶ Exercise the remaining part of the arm or leg
  - ▶ Change your position
  - ▶ Take a warm bath
  - ▶ Pretend to relax the part of the body that is missing
  - ▶ If you have an artificial limb on, take it off for a few minutes
  - ▶ If there is swelling, try an ace wrap
  - ▶ Write down when you have phantom pain and what you were doing when it happened. This might help you find some of the things that cause your pain.

**If you would like more written information, please call the Library for Health Information at (614)293-3707. You can also make the request by e-mail: [health-info@osu.edu](mailto:health-info@osu.edu).**

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