

WHAT'S YOUR Healthspan?

10 MYTHS about Healthy Aging

● **Preventing Falls**

● ***Movement is
MEDICINE***

*Recreation for
Better Health*

● **Online
Fitness**





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Coming of Age

Who gets to decide when we're officially old? We've all heard that age is just a number, and I'd like to think "correlation does not imply causation." But my mounting little aches and pains seem to be skilfully keeping pace with my escalating age. I think they're related somehow, and not so much a random coincidence.



thrive founder and publisher, Jeff Tiessen

Who gets to decide when we're officially old? Not surprisingly, the answer to this age-old age question seems to depend on whom you ask. My mother, at 77, declares that she's not old, tempered with a "well, I'm a young old!" Add to that, she reminds me that at 58, I'm getting old.

Ask Millennials, as studies have, and they define the start of "old" at age 59. Gen Xers say old age begins at 65, while Baby Boomers maintain that you're not really old until you hit 73.

Looking back to me in my twenties I might've agreed with the Millennials, but Gen Xers for sure with the once-certain retirement road sign, the bona fide mile marker for old age. And I realize this is cliché, but now that I'm an averagely-fit man in my late fifties, it seems to me that I'm smack dab in the middle of middle age.

So, who gets to decide when we're officially old? Well, genetics and generational opinions aside, each one of us gets a say in fact. Granted, aging with limb loss complicates things a bit. Yet, as you'll read in this "Healthy Aging" issue, there's plenty we can do every day to sway how old we feel and how old we might come to be.

Jeff Tiessen, *Publisher, thrive magazine*
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ABOUT THE PUBLISHER: Disability Today Publishing Group, a disability community leader for over 30 years, is known for its quality publications, and compelling editorial. The publisher of *Alignment* for Orthotics Prosthetics Canada, and a host of in-house magazine and book titles, the media firm is led by Jeff Tiessen, an amputee of 45+ years. Tiessen, a three-time Paralympian, award-winning journalist and Canadian Disability Hall of Fame inductee, is a respected advocate within the amputee community and healthcare fields as well.

thrive Living Well with Limb Loss

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AMPUTEE ALBERT LIN

Reveals Lost Cities



National Geographic explorer Albert Lin investigates historical mysteries in the new six-part series *Lost Cities Revealed with Albert Lin*. With a mission to uncover the wisdom of ancient civilizations, Lin and his team use cutting-edge technology to push the boundaries of exploration. From the dense jungles of Mexico, the cliffs of Scotland, and the underwater realms of Israel, *Lost Cities Revealed* inspires viewers to connect with our past in life-changing ways.

A pioneer in his field, Dr. Albert Yu-Min Lin is a renowned scientist, technologist, and explorer recognized for his unique approach to exploration. He combines technology with storytelling to inspire curiosity and conservation.

As an amputee, Lin is an advocate for those with disabilities. Through his Center for Human Frontiers, he campaigns for improving access to prosthetic devices using technology including 3D printing. Lin's right leg was amputated below the knee after a crash in a four-wheel-drive open-top vehicle. With his prosthesis, he continues to lead extremely physically demanding expeditions.

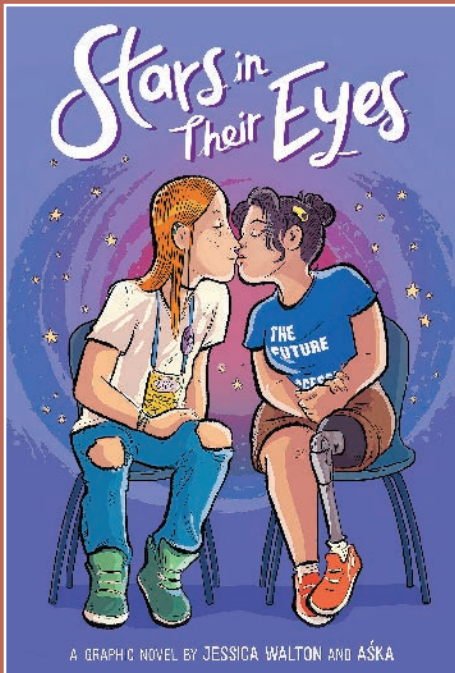
KICKING ICE

to the Curb

Steel-spiked winter boots are great on ice, but on concrete or flooring – not so much. It was with this in mind that Canadian entrepreneur Darrell Bachmann created KickSpike boots, with retractable spikes at the kick of a button. Whether for sports, work, or casual outdoor time, KickSpike's key is ease of on-demand traction technology.



YOUNG LOVE



In this coming-of-age graphic novel by Jessica Walton and Aska, *Stars in Their Eyes* provides readers with a lighthearted romance story and serves as a great resource for young amputees.

Maisie and Ollie discover that nothing beats the feeling of falling in love for the first time. Maisie is headed to FanCon to meet her idol Kara Bufano, an action hero from her favourite TV show and an amputee just like Maisie. But when Maisie and her mom arrive at the convention center, she is stopped in her tracks by Ollie, a cute volunteer working at the show. They geek out about nerd culture and as the day wears on, Maisie notices feelings for Ollie that she's never had before.

No CGI or Artificial Intelligence here. Just great work from Ottobock's Canadian Custom Silicone Team. Real-life realism, seamlessly combining functionality with aesthetics.

No
Artificial
Additives

VERY LOGICAL

An app for Össur Bionic prostheses is providing improved mobility at your fingertips with Össur Logic. With the new Proprio Foot, amputees can create activity-specific profiles for different terrains. Prosthetists adjust the functionality for users. With the Össur Logic Training feature users are empowered with easy exercises to practice at home and at their own pace to improve confidence and gait.



Spreading Sepsis Awareness

Sepsis is a life-threatening condition that occurs when the body's response to an infection injures its own tissues and organs. According to recent estimates, one in eighteen deaths in Canada involves sepsis, making it the 12th leading cause of death nationally.

The Canadian Sepsis Foundation, comprised of volunteers, critical care specialists, researchers and patient partners, has a mission to bring awareness to the public regarding the severity and preventability of sepsis incidence and deaths in Canada. [Learn more at canadiansepsisfoundation.ca](http://canadiansepsisfoundation.ca).

Canadian
Sepsis
Foundation



Fondation
Canadienne du
Sepsis

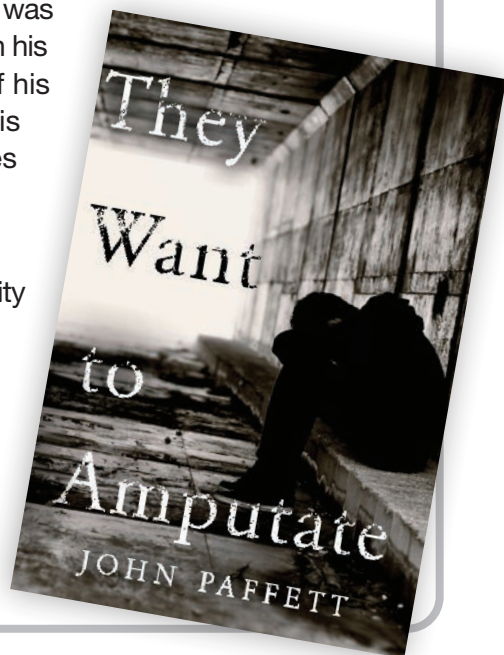
Amputee Author Delivers a Reflective Read

John Paffett's insightful memoir, *They Want to Amputate*,

shares the author's compelling life story as an amputee. At age 16 he was informed that his leg had to be amputated to save him from cancer. In his book, Paffett details his frustrations, learnings and acceptance of his disability. An honest and pragmatic recounting of losing a limb, his story also provides a wealth of support for individuals and families facing similar adversity.

"Looking outward is the normal day to day routine but I have looked inward and really explored the raw emotion and feelings of my disability acceptance," says Paffett, addressing issues such as pain management, and the impact on family and friends over fifty years ago in the United Kingdom. Humorous, poignant and reflective, *They Want to Amputate* introduces readers to many different approaches to living life to the fullest as an amputee.

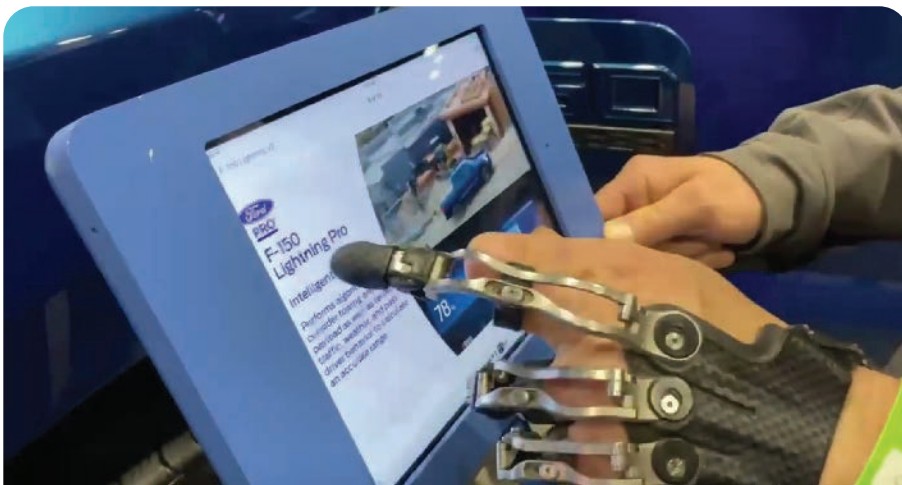
Available in paperback (£10.99) and Kindle format (£2.99) on Amazon. Or contact John Paffett at john.paffett@hotmail.com.





GREEN Prostheses

FILLAUER recently introduced the world's first bio-attributed prosthetic foot shell, crafted from revolutionary BIOVYN™ material. This innovative foot shell lowers carbon emissions and also boasts enhanced durability. To complete the package, each foot shell includes a sleek, black prosthetic sock available in three sizes.



GOT THE TOUCH

Partial-hand prosthesis wearers can now make their Naked Prosthetics device touchscreen compatible. The Conductive Tip feature provides users with the ability to interface with smartphones, tablets and other touch-related systems.

A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER



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Lasting Legacy of WAR AMPUTEES

Amid the wars, countless Canadian soldiers and nurses displayed extraordinary bravery and unwavering dedication, putting their lives on the line for our country. Many of these individuals returned home bearing the profound physical and emotional scars of war, having lost limbs in the line of duty.

Their experiences as amputees not only shaped their own lives but, as members of The War Amps of Canada, they left a lasting legacy for generations of amputees to come.

During the First World War, **Madeleine Jaffray** (1889-1972), served as a nurse in a hospital near Bordeaux, France. The hospital was bombarded by German aviators, and she was

wounded in the foot by a piece of shrapnel from one of the bombs. Her injury led to an amputation, making her Canada's only female war amputee of the First World War.

Mike Krulicki (1925-2020) was just a teenager when he volunteered for service in the Second World War. He enlisted with the Irish Regiment of Canada, and in 1944, while fighting in the Italian Campaign, stepped on a landmine and lost his right leg below the knee.

Arthur Johnson (1929-2006) served with the Canadian Army Special Forces as a mortar man with the Royal Canadian Regiment in the fight for the freedom of South Korea. In August 1952, in the midst of intense enemy shelling, a mortar landed close by, resulting in the loss of his right leg and damage to his right arm.

These honourable individuals contributed their time to various activities of The War Amps and shared their experiences as amputees with others, including modern-day veterans and children.

On Remembrance Day especially, but also throughout the year, The War Amps pays tribute to the sacrifice and service of all those who served and continue to serve.



Madeleine Jaffray (First World War), Mike Krulicki (Second World War), Arthur Johnson (Korean War)

Limbs of FREEDOM

An exceptional initiative, Limbs of Freedom has impacted countless lives by offering mobility to amputees in Mexico. Liner manufacturer ALPS South shared the news about the project and expressed how privileged the company was to be able to support this important cause on a recent trip to Ensenada.



thrive PODCAST

Compelling Stories and Expert Advice

Life & Limb

A monthly podcast about Living Well with Limb Loss

Featuring Special Guests...



HOSTED BY
thrive publisher
Jeff Tiessen



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*Normalizing
with Comedy*



Alvin Law
*Attitude is
Science*



Martin Robinson
*Prosthetist
Relations*



Linda Norton
*Residual
Limb Care*



Alexis Hillyard
*Limb Difference
Love*



Kevin Rempel
*The Hero
Mindset*



For more on these guests and others, visit thrivemag.ca.

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EPISODES AVAILABLE at <https://thrivemag.ca>.



Gratitude

When It Seems Like Nothing Is Going Right

By Marina Alteza

*“You can’t be
FEARFUL and
GRATEFUL
simultaneously.”*

~Tony Robbins

It may be challenging to step into a state of gratitude during a time of tumult and fear. But gratitude can lift us out from under the heavy weight of our unsavory thoughts and feelings and move us into the direction of kindness.

I have faced difficult moments in my life. I had cervical cancer a few years ago. I remember going through a number of emotions. When I first heard the diagnosis, I was in shock. It was hard for me to process that my body was sick. I thought I had taken good care of myself, and hearing the “c” word was incomprehensible.

For those who have been or are sick, you'll know what I mean when I say that I felt alone. Even though I was surrounded by my loving family and friends, it felt like the spotlight was on me and I was the only actor on stage.

And then there was the nagging fear of dying. My father passed from liver cancer ten years earlier, and I thought my fate would be similar. These thoughts gnawed at me throughout the day, especially at night. It was difficult to be present. I was totally consumed by my thoughts.

I also felt hopeless. I couldn't see past the sickness. My new normal was going to the hospital for radiation and chemotherapy treatments and going home to rest. I lost a lot of weight and became weak, at times too weak to even leave my bed. My bedroom was my very own shelter-in-place.

And I felt like I lost my independence. I had to rely on others, not just doctors and nurses, but also my family and friends to take care of me. I always thought of myself as self-reliant, so it gutted me to lose that autonomy.

The person who I thought I was started to disappear right before my eyes. In retrospect, I recognize now why the fear was heightened. Part of my identity was attached to my body. If the body fades, then who am I?

Gratitude Saved Me

I'm not sure at what point I started to practice gratitude. But this practice, among others, such as mindfulness, saved me.

There was resistance at first. On the day I began my gratitude journey, I asked myself, "What is there to be thankful for in being sick?" What followed was this: "There's nothing to be grateful for." I conceded to my ego.



The following day was a little better. I aimed a little lower. I looked for the low hanging fruit — smaller things that I appreciated, like having the ability to walk even if it was only a short distance, listen to music, breathe, and drink my tea.

Each day I identified what brought me joy, what brought me peace, what made me smile, and what made me see differently.

And from there, I started to look for opportunities to be thankful, whether it was at the hospital or cooped up in my room, or when I couldn't recognize myself in the mirror because I had lost so much weight or when the normal that I knew was upended.

Especially during moments of acute fear, I searched deep and long for that tiny scrap of something, anything to drop my gratitude anchor in.

Gifts of Gratitude

The practice of gratitude was important during the time when I was sick for a few reasons.

Practicing gratitude brought me into the present moment.

For anyone experiencing adversity, whether it's an illness, job loss, a broken relationship, or a death, fear is often the ruling emotion. It's also

the most destructive to the mind and body.

When I practiced being in the state of gratitude, it disrupted the fear pattern in my consciousness. A simple gratitude prompt such as "What brings me joy at this moment?" tripped up my ego. This prevented my ego from playing out its catastrophic thought cycle.

When I couldn't leave my bedroom, I would just look out the window and stare at the trees. I never paid attention to the trees prior to getting sick, but during those times, I noticed how stoic, strong, and beautiful they were.

When I focused on what I appreciated, it made me feel better.

I didn't know the science behind it at the time, but I felt much better after doing my gratitude exercise, so I kept doing it. I felt better physically and emotionally.

Fearful thoughts have a damaging impact on the mind and body. Fear erodes the immune system and causes cardiovascular and gastrointestinal problems. Chronic fear also disrupts brain processes, which prevents us from regulating our emotions. This leaves us vulnerable to acute emotions and impulsiveness.



I started to see beyond the physical illness. I became hopeful. My outlook started to change in that I started to visualize myself healthy and physically fit. I'd imagine going on hikes up a mountain.

My gratitude practice made me more resilient.

The more I fostered a grateful disposition, the stronger my mental state became. There are many studies that show that being in a state of gratefulness can lead to mental well-being and resilience.

During the course of treatments, I encountered a few obstacles such as contracting C. difficile and becoming severely dehydrated. These are common side effects of the treatments. As well, during my medical leave, the company I worked for went through a massive re-organization, and I got reassigned and lost team members. I took these challenges in stride. Even in these moments, I looked for the silver linings.

How to Begin a Gratitude Practice

There are many ways to implement a gratitude practice. The easiest requires nothing but changing what you focus on when you wake up in the morning.

Morning Gratitude

1. Upon waking up, do not pick up your phone; instead, take a few deep breaths.
2. Think of three things for which you're grateful. Start with something small, such as being alive, the fact that you can breathe, you have a comfortable bed, you have a roof over your head, etc.
3. If you notice resistance, just become aware of it. Do not force anything.
4. If it's helpful, you can say, "I'm willing to release the resistance that I have to this gratitude practice."
5. Perhaps a different prompt might work, such as:
 - What is your favourite song and why?
 - Look outside the window. What is one thing you see that pleases you?
 - Describe who or what makes you feel safe.
 - Describe who or what makes you laugh.
 - Describe who allows you to be yourself.

Appreciation Letter

1. Think of someone who's had a positive impact on your life.

2. Write a letter or email addressing this person.
3. Describe what they did for you that you appreciate.
4. Explain how their action changed the course of your life in a positive way.
5. Send the letter.

When I got better, I took the opportunity to do inner work and self-reflection. I recognized the blessing in getting sick. I saw with clarity the destructive path that I was on prior to the diagnosis, which I was blind to before. I was at the mercy of my thoughts and emotions. I played small. I was inauthentic. And most significant was the recognition that I didn't love myself.

With the help of tools such as meditation and gratitude, I started to release limiting beliefs and reprogram my thinking. I started to see myself in a different light. I began to approach life with joy and optimism. And most importantly, I started to love myself.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Marina Alteza is the founder of No Longer Empty (nolongerempty.com) where she shares how she transforms her relationship with life challenges using gratitude, self-compassion, and mindfulness. Her site offers tools and resources to help and inspire readers to live and express a fuller and more authentic life.



JOIN THE PAAC!!



Meet Erin, PAAC's newest ambassador

"I joined PAAC to connect with the amputee/limb difference community! I hope to make some great connections and be able to provide new amputees some tips and tricks I've picked up over the past 20+ years, along with learning some new things myself!"



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Healthy Aging

How's
YOUR

HEALTHSPAN?



The past century has seen tremendous growth in the lifespan of most Canadians. We now expect to live about 25 years longer than our ancestors of 100 years ago. Advancements in technology, medicine and safety have played important roles in that lifespan gain. But so has healthspan.

Healthspan is the period in life in which a person is reasonably healthy and free of chronic disease. It can be advanced by our own actions. Exercise and physical activity are cornerstones of healthy aging and reduce the risk of developing some diseases and disabilities associated with aging. Physical activity can also be a treatment of some chronic illnesses, such as high blood pressure. Healthy eating is also critical for healthy aging. As you experience aging with limb loss, you have power and control over what you choose to focus on. Coping with aging and limb loss is difficult, but don't get stuck. Take an active role with your medical team and the other professionals in your life.

10 MYTHS ABOUT AGING

Many people make assumptions about aging and what it's like to grow "old". But as we get older, it is important to understand the positive aspects of aging. Research shows that you can help preserve your health and mobility as you age by adopting or continuing healthy habits and lifestyle choices.

Don't fall into the trap of believing misconceptions about aging and older adults.

1 Depression is normal in older adults.

As people age, some find themselves feeling isolated and alone which can lead to feelings of depression, anxiety and sadness. But these feelings are not a normal part of aging. Growing older can have many emotional benefits, such as long-lasting relationships with friends and family and a lifetime of memories to share with loved ones. In fact, studies show that older adults are less likely to

experience depression than young adults. Depression is a common and potentially serious mood disorder, but there are treatments that are effective for most people.

2 The older I get, the less sleep I need.

As we age, we may find ourselves having a harder time falling and staying asleep. A common misconception is that a person's sleep needs decline with age. Older adults need the same amount of sleep as all adults — seven to nine hours each night. Getting enough

sleep keeps you healthy and alert. Among many other benefits, adequate sleep can also help reduce your risk of falls and improve your overall mental well-being.

3 Older adults can't learn new things.

Not true! Older adults still have the ability to learn new things, create new memories, and improve on a variety of skills. While aging often comes with changes in thinking, many cognitive changes are positive, such as having more knowledge and insight from



“Inactivity is often more to blame than age when older people lose the ability to do things on their own.”



a lifetime of experiences. Trying and learning new skills may even improve cognitive abilities. Studies have found that older adults who learned quilting or digital photography had improved memory. New social connections and engaging in social activities like a dance class or book club can boost your cognitive health too.

4 It's inevitable that older people get dementia.

Although the risk of dementia grows as people get older, it is not inevitable. Many people live into their 90s and beyond without the declines in thinking and behaviour that characterize dementia. Occasionally forgetting an appointment or losing your keys are typical

signs of mild forgetfulness, which is common in normal aging. Nevertheless, talk with a doctor if you have serious concerns about your memory and thinking, or notice changes in your behaviour and personality.

5 Older adults should avoid exercise so they don't get injured.

As we age, some think exercise can do more harm than good, especially with a chronic condition. However, studies show that you have a lot more to gain by being active — and a lot to lose by sitting too much. Inactivity is often more to blame than age when older people lose the ability to do things on their own. Almost anyone, at any age and with most health conditions, can participate in some type of physical activity.

Physical activity can help manage some chronic conditions. Exercise and physical activity are not only great for your mental and physical health, but can help keep you independent as you age. For example, Tai Chi and other mind and body movement practices have shown to improve balance and stability in older adults and this can help maintain independence and prevent future falls.

6 A family member has Alzheimer's disease, so I will have it too.

A person's chance of having Alzheimer's disease may be higher when there is a family history of dementia because there are some genes that are known to increase risk. However, having a parent with Alzheimer's does not necessarily mean that someone will develop the disease.

Environmental and lifestyle factors, such as exercise, diet, exposure to pollutants, and smoking also may affect a person's risk for Alzheimer's. While you cannot control the genes you inherited, you can take steps to stay healthy as you age, such as getting regular exercise, controlling high blood pressure, and not smoking.

7 Now that I am older, I will have to give up driving.

As our population ages, the number of licensed older adults on the road will continue to increase. Natural changes can occur with age that may affect a person's ability to drive, like having slower response speed, diminished vision or hearing, and reduced strength or mobility. The question of when it is time to limit or stop driving should not be about age. Rather, it should be about your ability to drive safely.



8 Only women need to worry about osteoporosis.

Although osteoporosis is more common in women, this disease still affects many men and could be underdiagnosed. Men may not be as likely to have osteoporosis because they start with more bone density than women. One in five men over the age of 50 will have an osteoporosis-related fracture. By age 65 or 70, men and women lose bone mass at the same rate.

Many of the things that put men at risk are the same for women, including family history, not enough calcium or vitamin D, and too little exercise. Low levels of testosterone, too much alcohol, taking certain drugs, and smoking are other risk factors.



9 I'm "too old" to quit smoking.

It doesn't matter how old you are or how long you have been smoking, quitting at any time improves your health. Smokers who quit have fewer illnesses such as colds and the flu, lower rates of bronchitis and pneumonia, and an overall better feeling of well-being.

The benefits of quitting are almost immediate. Within a few hours, the carbon monoxide level in your blood begins to decline and, in a few weeks, circulation improves, and lung function increases. Quitting can lower heart rate and blood pressure over time, and lower the risk of cancer, heart attack, stroke and lung disease.

10 My blood pressure has lowered, so I can stop taking my medication.

High blood pressure is a very common problem for older adults — especially those in their 80s and 90s — and can lead to serious health problems if not treated properly. If you take high blood pressure medicine and your blood pressure goes down, it means the medicine and any lifestyle changes you have made are working. It's important to continue your treatment and activities long-term. If you stop taking your medicine, your blood pressure could rise again, increasing the risk for health problems like stroke and kidney disease. Talk with your doctor about possibilities for safely changing or stopping your medication.



What We Know About Healthy Aging

Many factors influence healthy aging. Some of these, such as genetics, are not in our control. Others — like exercise, a healthy diet, going to the doctor regularly, and taking care of our mental health — are within our reach. Research confirms that there are plenty of actions you can take to help manage your health, live as independently as possible, and maintain your quality of life as you age.

Take Care of Your Physical Health

There are multiple ways to improve the chances of maintaining optimal health later in life. Taking care of your physical health includes staying active, making healthy food choices, getting enough sleep, limiting alcohol intake, and proactively managing your health care. Small changes in each of these areas can go a long way to support healthy aging.

Whether you love it or hate it, physical activity is a cornerstone of healthy aging. Scientific evidence suggests that people who exercise regularly not only live longer, but also may live better — meaning they enjoy more years of life without pain or disability.

A study of adults 40 years old and older found that taking 8,000 steps or more per day, compared to only taking 4,000 steps, was associated with a 51% lower risk of death from a number of specific causes. You can increase the number of steps you get each day by doing activities that keep your body moving, such as gardening, walking the dog, and taking the stairs instead of the elevator.

Exercise is also an essential tool for maintaining a healthy weight. Adults with obesity have an increased risk of many diseases, like type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure.

“Try starting with small changes by adopting one or two changes in eating. Several studies have shown that incorporating even a part of these eating patterns, such as more fish or more leafy greens, into your daily eating habits can improve health outcomes.”

However, thinner is not always healthier. Becoming too thin as an older adult can weaken your immune system, increase the risk of bone fracture, and in some cases may be a symptom of disease. Both obesity and underweight conditions can lead to loss of muscle mass, which may cause a person to feel weak and easily worn out.

As we age, muscle function often declines. Older adults may not have the energy to do everyday activities and can lose some of their independence. Exercise however, can help older adults maintain muscle mass as they age. In addition to helping older adults live better, maintaining muscle mass can help them live longer. Researchers have found that in adults older than 55, muscle mass was a better predictor of longevity than was weight or body mass index (BMI). So, even if you're not losing weight, exercise can still help you live longer and better.

Healthy Eating Make Smart Food Choices

Making smart food choices can help protect from certain health problems as we age and may even help improve brain function.

As with exercise, eating well is not just about your weight. With so many different diets out there, choosing what to eat can be confusing. Dietary guidelines suggest an eating pattern with lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, healthy fats, and lean proteins.

Much research shows that the Mediterranean-style eating pattern, which includes fresh produce, whole grains, and healthy fats, but less dairy and more fish than a traditional North American diet, may have a positive impact on health, particularly lowering the risk of sudden cardiac death. Low-salt diets have also shown to deliver significant health benefits, with respect to blood pressure, weight loss, and the risk of type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

Try starting with small changes by adopting one or two changes in eating. Several studies have shown that incorporating even a part of these eating patterns, such as more fish or more leafy greens, into your daily eating habits can improve health outcomes. If you are

concerned about what you eat, talk with your doctor about ways you can make better food choices.

Getting a Good Night's Sleep

Even though older adults need the same seven to nine hours of sleep as all adults, they often don't get enough. Feeling sick or being in pain can make it harder to sleep, and some medicines can keep you awake. Sleep quality matters for memory and mood. Not getting enough quality sleep can lead to irritability, depression, forgetfulness and more likelihood of falls. Conversely, getting good sleep is associated with lower rates of insulin resistance, heart disease, and obesity. Sleep can also improve





your creativity and decision-making skills, and even your blood sugar levels.

There are a number of things that you can do to help you sleep better. Following a regular sleep schedule is one. Try to fall asleep and get up at the same time each day. Avoid napping late in the day, as this may keep you awake at night. Exercise helps you sleep better, too, if it isn't too close to bedtime. Research suggests that behavioural interventions, such as mindfulness meditation, can also improve sleep quality.

See a Doctor Regularly

Going to the doctor for regular health screenings is essential for healthy aging. A 2021 study found that getting regular check-ups helps doctors catch chronic diseases early and can help patients reduce risk factors for disease, such as high blood pressure and cholesterol levels. People who regularly went to the doctor reported improved quality of life and feelings of wellness.

Visit the doctor at least yearly and possibly more depending on your health. You cannot reap the benefits of medical advancements without physical exams and other tests. Regular screenings can

uncover diseases and conditions that you may not yet be aware of, such as diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular disease. If you only seek medical attention when you're experiencing symptoms, you may lose the chance of identifying a disease in its earliest stages, when it would be most treatable.

Take Care of Your Mental Health

Mental health, or mental wellness, is essential to your overall health and quality of life. It affects how we think, feel, act, make choices, and relate to others. Managing social isolation, loneliness, stress, depression, and mood through medical and self-care is key to healthy aging.

As people age, hearing and vision loss, memory loss, disability, trouble getting around, and the loss of family and friends can make it difficult to maintain social connections. This makes older adults more likely to be socially isolated or to feel lonely. Although they sound similar, social isolation and loneliness are different. Loneliness is the distressing feeling of being alone or separated, while social isolation is the lack of social contacts and having few people to interact with regularly.

Several recent studies show that older adults who are socially isolated or feel lonely are at higher risk for heart disease, depression and cognitive decline, including memory.

Research also shows that being socially active can benefit older adults. Making new social contacts was associated with improved physical and psychological well-being. Being social may also help you reach your exercise goals. A 2019 study found that older adults who had regular contact with friends and family were more physically active than those who did not.

Manage Your Stress

Stress is a natural part of life and comes in many forms. Sometimes it arises from difficult events or circumstances. Positive changes, like the birth of a grandchild or a promotion, can cause stress too. Research shows that constant stress can change the brain, affect memory, and increase the risk of developing Alzheimer's or related dementias.

Older adults are at particular risk for stress and stress-related problems. Researchers have found that cortisol levels in a person's body increase steadily after middle-age, and that this age-related increase in stress may drive changes in the brain. Long-term stress also may contribute to, or worsen, a range of health problems, including digestive disorders, headaches, and sleep disorders. Finding ways to lower stress and increase emotional stability supports healthy aging.

You can manage stress with meditation techniques, physical activity, and by participating in activities you enjoy. Keeping a journal may also help you identify and challenge negative and unhelpful thoughts. Reach out to friends and family who can help you cope in a positive way.



Depression and Overall Mood

Although depression is common in older adults, it can be difficult to recognize. For some, sadness is not their main symptom. Instead, they might feel numb or uninterested in activities and may not be as willing to talk about their feelings.

Depression not only affects mental health, but also physical health. Hundreds of studies from around the world show that depression increases risk of heart disease and metabolic disorders. Research has also shown that recurrent depression is a risk factor for dementia.

Although different than depression, which is a serious medical disorder, mood changes can also influence aging. The way you think about aging can also make a difference. Research shows that whether you hold negative or positive views about aging may impact your health as you age. Negative beliefs about aging may increase undesirable health outcomes, while positive beliefs about aging may decrease some risks.

Depression, even when severe, can be treated. As soon as you begin noticing signs, it's important to get evaluated by a healthcare professional. In addition to deep sad-

ness or numbness, lack of sleep and loss of appetite are also common symptoms of depression in older adults. If you think you or a loved one may have depression, start by making an appointment to see your doctor or healthcare provider.

Leisure Activities and Hobbies

Your favourite activities are not only fun — they may also be good for your health. Research shows that people who participate in hobbies and social and leisure activities may be at lower risk for some health problems.

Research on music, theater, dance, creative writing, and other participatory arts shows promise for improving older adults' quality of life and well-being, from better cognitive function, memory, and self-esteem to reduced stress and increased social interaction. Even hobbies as simple as taking care of a pet can improve your health.

Look for opportunities to participate in activities. Get out and about by going to a sporting event, trying a new restaurant, or visiting a museum. Learn how to cook or play a musical instrument. Consider volunteering at a school, library, or hospital to become more active in your community.

Next Steps

Embrace the opportunity to change. Find a new passion, go on an adventure, and push boundaries by not letting age define your limits.

Explore the rewards of growing older. With age comes knowledge, which provides insight and confidence. Continue to grow that knowledge.

Stay engaged in your community. Everyone benefits when everyone is connected and involved.

Form relationships. As an essential ingredient of well-being, relationships can enhance your quality of life by introducing new ideas and unique perspectives.

Taking care of your physical, mental, and cognitive health is important for healthy aging. Even making small changes in your daily life can help you live longer and better. Support your physical health by staying active, eating and sleeping well, and going to the doctor regularly. Support your mental health by interacting with family and friends, staying positive, and participating in activities that you enjoy.



Sources: National Institute on Aging • Amputee Coalition

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Online Fitness IS IT RIGHT FOR YOU?

By Megan Williamson, BA, CPT

COVID-19 changed many things about our lives, and fitness is one of them. During the pandemic, many fitness facilities were closed for months and gym-goers had to find other options to stay fit.

One of those options was online fitness. And it still is. As I am sure you are aware, there are many ways that we can look to on the internet to get or stay fit.

The most common way is watching videos or routines from fitness trainers that you can follow from home. Another way is live streaming services, like Facebook LIVE, where you can tune into video classes.

In terms of personal fitness coaching, many coaches like myself have continued to use platforms like Zoom or Microsoft Teams to offer classes with an invite and a meeting code. There are apps and subscription-based fitness options for access to content and sometimes even a coach; much like my Ocean Insider Club.

I had to pivot the majority of my in-person clientele to online platforms during the pandemic and when my Vancouver fitness studio reopened, most of my clients chose to stay online instead.

WHY DID THEY CHOOSE TO STAY ONLINE?

Well, there are a number of objective benefits of online training.

Affordability

Not only does it save you time, but money too with no gym membership. And choosing something like a subscription-based training model, typically the monthly fees are much cheaper than in-person training.

Accessible Anywhere

Out of town but still want to log into your online training program? You can still train with phone or computer access. If you have internet, you have access to your workouts from anywhere at any time.

Convenient and Flexible

Convenience is tied to accessibility as mentioned above. But convenience can also be tied to flexibility in the sense that you can easily plan your sessions or workout time around other commitments.

Many of our clients who typically take public or accessible transit are not inconvenienced by travel time and restraints by working out from home.

Wanting to better understand this shift, I asked my clients why they were choosing to stay online, even though they originally started with in-person fitness coaching.

HERE'S WHAT MOST SAID:

"I'm working out more than I was before."

"I am getting more support from my family."

"I feel more motivated with all of the variety."

"I feel stronger."





One client who responded with “more support from her family” explained that her kids were now making a “workout date” with her every Friday afternoon. Participating together as a team, it helped keep her on track with that extra support.

Another client shared that she felt more motivated with more variety. Online, she began partaking in a variety of fitness options that she normally would not be able to. She was streaming LIVE adaptive workouts on Thursdays, attending online yoga on Mondays and Fridays, and was also a member of our Ocean Insider Club.

Now, I’m not saying that online fitness is better for everyone. There are some people who don’t benefit from online fitness or online fitness coaching only.

However, the benefits for many are motivating and it does seem to be a better option for a lot of our clients in reaching their personal goals. And so, why would I not support that if it brings them success and a healthier lifestyle?

If you think you might benefit from online fitness training, I encourage you to explore what is out there for you. You never know, you might surprise yourself with a new fun and convenient, and affordable, exercise routine!

For exercise ideas, workout programs or a consultation, visit oceanrehabandfitness.com.

Follow Megan’s programs with an Ocean Insider Club membership subscription.



About Ocean Rehab and Fitness

Megan Williamson is a certified fitness coach through the National Academy of Sports Medicine and the head coach at Ocean Rehab and Fitness. Alongside her team, she offers adaptive training for those living with spinal cord injuries and many other physical disabilities. Her mission is to make exercise inclusive for everyone regardless of limitations.





CHRIS PINTO

Makes Safekeeping His Business

By Max Warfield

Chris Pinto contemplates life in the most comprehensive way. He is exceedingly empathetic to the needs of others, yet he unapologetically gives his own interests prominence as well. He pre-plans everything.

For the 40-year-old Torontonians, 2017 was a foundational year for his view of a beautiful life. His path back then was carefully orchestrated; however, reality had other ideas. It was a summer filled with shock, pain and heartbreak. But now, as he reflects, his profound thoughts percolating, he will tell you that he wouldn't have it any other way.

As the oldest child with ten siblings, Pinto often dreamed of playing in the NBA, being an MMA fighter or a rapper. Yet, it was the security business that ultimately called him, a career central to his heart too.

Pinto identifies as a man who loves to protect and be there for others, and at the suggestion of his wife, pushed his progression from bouncer to bodyguard and security jobs. He

combined his experience with connections that he had made over the years and started his own business.

"Security is preparation," says Pinto. And yet, life brings its own surprises too. On a warm summer night just a year after his business launched he was badly injured in a traffic accident on his motorcycle. While most would be focused on their wounds and level of discomfort, Pinto fretted

about his work responsibilities as the ambulance's shrill siren grew in his ears.

He never made it to his post that night and that troubled him much more than his horrific wounds. "Where would his business go?" he wondered. "Who would Chris Pinto the daunting security man and bodyguard be now? How would he provide for his family?" A few months and thirteen surgeries later, he became a below-knee amputee.

During difficult times, the all-important support system was there for him. Friends, brothers, cousins. His wife and son faithfully made arduous trips to St. John's Sunnybrook. The travel burden was one of the hardest issues of his recovery days he remembers, but he compartmentalized and remained laser-locked on his recovery.

A famous actor once said, "I made up the name Cary Grant, and then I became him." It's as if Pinto is motored by a similar inner drive, having conceived his own refrain to live by. As he chooses how to expend his energies, an inner voice prods him along: "Be unstoppable. Be undeniable. Be unlimited" (now spelled unlimb-ited, he jokes).

The hospital was an uneasy place for Pinto and he took the earliest leave possible. He would do much of his own rehab at home.



“When I was learning to walk again, falling and getting back up, banging back and forth through the condo halls, and crying at setbacks, my neighbours were very forgiving — just poking their heads out every once in a while.”

To become unstoppable, he was off to the gym, a place he went to infrequently before his injury. “My cousins and brothers would show up daily to pick me up and put me in the car, even on days I didn’t feel it,” he shares. “Later, as my motivation elevated, it grew into a new feeling. It was hard at first. It’s a choice and I had to make it happen.” Four months later Pinto stepped up to his business’s entryway, ensuring all was safe. Way ahead of schedule, he fulfilled his responsibility. He made it to his post.

Today, Pinto’s security business — Upper Echelon Services — which employs his 16-year-old son, is expanding. His employees project professionalism, look sharp, do their job well and provide services that have branched out to lifestyle management.

He travels to Miami once a year for a protective skill workshop. “I take part every year. Gun training, pistols, emergency medical, stop the bleeding, hand-to-hand combat — and marine-style obstacle courses with ropes and ladders and barricades. And then there’s the running. “With a running blade prosthesis that ParaSport Ontario made possible through its Play to Podium Equipment Fund, I ran my first mile ever in my life... as an amputee. I’m always pushing myself to that next level. This is what undeniable is. My leg — yes, but I earned all of the credentials to do my job... like everyone else.”

Pinto plays basketball to stay in shape. “We just won the championship,” he grins. “Most people



don’t realize that I’m an amputee unless I tell them.”

He is his own harshest critic, yet carries it with an easy smile. “For a long time, I put energy into other things and not myself. Now I have a very good gauge of where I need to put that energy — and how much. Last season was my first working with the Toronto Raptors. It was great. I was on the road, made a lot of connections, amazing. Being on the road was a challenge. I had to bring an extra leg, tools to adjust things... just in case. One night I had to sprint to the other side of the court to subdue a scuffle.” His mind’s eye remembers the occasion: “I got down there fast!”

Pinto has always thought of himself to be a man of the people — seeing that things are the way they should be. “That’s especially true now that I’m an amputee,” he declares. “An injury is a liability for some. I had to lean-in extra hard to prove myself. I understand and I also have perspective. I’m fighting for everyone else. I know it’s a long road for a lot of people.”

He loves to travel too, for business or pleasure. His wife and son accompany him whenever possible. “I usually meet two or three amputees each trip — at least. I always go up and talk to them. I stop what I’m doing. Like, my wife and I are having breakfast, and an amputee walks



“Handle what you need to handle and take care of what you need to take care of. You gotta go all the way in. And then if it doesn’t work, at least you can say it didn’t work and try something else.”

by and I’m up and gone!” he laughs. “I love to help people. Just talk. Give them things or fix something,” he explains.

Remembering one particular man on one of his trips, Pinto’s speech slows and softens when he speaks of an amputee man he saw in Mexico sitting in a heap in a cart that his son was pushing. “I have reflective moments. A lot of it is perspective. For me, I just pushed through. A lot of it was blocked out. I made a choice from a young age about how I wanted my life to be. I grew up not necessarily poor, but hard. It’s how it is. It was difficult. I didn’t have much. You have to find your purpose. I chose to get a job and not do anything illegal. Just seeing what some people’s choices can do to their life, I came to know what I didn’t want. You are what your choices are. You may have to change the way you do things. I grew to ask myself, ‘does this align with my goals?’ I could have done something else, but security was always there inside of me. My wife is a big reason I am where I am.”

Pinto is very proud when he notices his son watching him and how he carries himself. “My son doesn’t complain much. If he gets down, he always gets right back up... lessons from my security business,” he laughs. “But in my line of work, and my life, I have to be flexible. I have to be able to change and adapt. Of course, my son will make his own choice, but he can be part of a legacy that we are building, a family business. It will last as long as we take care of it.”

Pinto believes the concepts of a successful security business gives all that he needs to succeed in life. Be prepared, as well as his mantra of Be unstoppable; Be undeniable; Be unlimited. “When I break it down it’s about not caring about what others think about you. Handle what you need to handle and take care of what you need to take care of. You gotta go all the way in. And then if it doesn’t work, at least you can say it didn’t work and try something else. And be there for each other. Be who you needed

when you were growing up. Be that person.”

Things are that simple to Pinto, the profound and thoughtful man. Although he’s not glad that he lost his leg, he now sees it as providential. Whether things happen for a reason or not, Pinto is assured that “you don’t need a lot in life; that’s what I’ve learned. Getting to that sense of security is the tough part.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Max Warfield was born in Ridgefield, Connecticut, now making his home on the southern shores of Lake Ontario.



A correspondent for the *Lockport Union Sun & Journal* and the *Niagara Gazette*, Warfield has also written and published numerous novels.

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Preventing FALLS



Falls are the leading cause of injury among seniors and roughly half of these falls occur at home. Every year, approximately one-third of seniors experience a serious fall that results in consequences to their health, independence and quality of life. Fortunately, many falls are preventable.

REDUCE YOUR RISK WITH THESE TIPS



- **Exercise regularly.** It is recommended that adults aged 65 years or older should do at least 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous aerobic physical activity per week, in bouts of 10 minutes or more. If you have poor mobility, physical activity can help enhance your balance and prevent falls. Make sure you have proper footwear that includes rubber soles, low heels and laces or Velcro that securely fasten. And don't be embarrassed to use

aids to daily living – it can keep you safe and active.

- **Take a bone density test.** Osteoporosis is a disease that makes bones brittle and more likely to break during a fall. At least 80 per cent of broken bones in older adults are related to osteoporosis, with older women at greatest risk of developing the disease. Ask your doctor for a bone mineral density test to determine your risk.



- **Know your medications.** Taking several medications increases your chance of falling. Speak to your doctor about all the medications you are taking to learn why you are taking them, what side effects they have (such as drowsiness or dizziness) and if there are alternatives.

- **Reduce home hazards.** These include loose carpets and cords on the floor, items blocking the stairs and poor lighting. Also

consider installing assistive devices, such as grab bars or raised toilet seats.

- **If you fall.** Try to land on your buttocks to prevent more serious injuries. Don't rush to get up. Make sure you are not injured before trying to get up or letting others help you get up. And don't let the fear of falling again prevent you from being active. Inactivity creates an even greater risk of falling.



To learn more, contact Osteoporosis Canada at 1-800-463-6842 or visit osteoporosis.ca.

To order related publications from the Public Health Agency of Canada, including the *Safe Living Guide — A Guide to Home Safety for Seniors*, *You CAN Prevent Falls!* and *Steps to Stair Safety at Home*, call toll-free: 1-800-OCa-nada (622-6232). Or visit: canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/aging-seniors.html.

Osteoporosis

Known as the “silent thief”, osteoporosis is characterized by low bone mass and deterioration of bone tissue. The disease can occur over a number of years without any symptoms and unfortunately, by the time affected bones break or fracture, the disease is already fairly advanced and less treatable. The most common fractures associated with osteoporosis are in the hip, spine, wrist and shoulder. Still, no single cause for osteoporosis has been identified.



Prevalence of Osteoporosis

Canadians 50 years of age or older are at highest risk. An estimated 2.3 million Canadians are living with the disease. At least 1 in 3 women and 1 in 5 men will break a bone due to osteoporosis in their lifetime. Fractures from osteoporosis are more common than heart attack, stroke and breast cancer combined.

All About Function

The visionary and manufacturer of functional devices for finger and partial-hand amputees, Naked Prosthetics isn't just about the product; its designs start with getting people back to work and back to doing the things they love.

With four products to replace the partial or total loss of a finger – PIPDriver™, MCPDriver™, ThumbDriver™ and GripLock Finger™ – the company's devices are individually designed to mimic the natural motion of the finger.

Questions? Ask a prosthetist, or start with these frequently asked questions received and responded to by Naked Prosthetics (NP).

Q. What kind of movements will I be able to do with a Naked Prosthetics device?

A. NP's body-driven devices utilize the remainder of a digit to power each device. They are optimized to be strongest in the most functional positions, such as turning a door-knob, holding a pen, or typing on a keyboard. The GripLock Finger is a passive and ratcheting mechanical digit for manual positioning to many functional grasp patterns.

Q. How do I know what type of prosthesis I need?

A. To determine the product that benefits you most, schedule an evaluation with a prosthetist. If you're not currently working with one, NP's Customer Care team will help find one in your area.



Q. Do NP devices have a motor sound, like a myoelectric prosthesis?

A. No. NP devices are body-driven. No batteries or electronic components.

Q. Can I wear multiple devices side by side?

A. Yes. NP devices are low profile and sleek so you can wear several devices together.

Q. Are there different colours to choose from?

A. Yes. You can choose from several different colour coating options. Visit npdevices.com for available colours.

Q. Do NP fingertips interface with touchscreens?

A. The standard fingertip design is not conductive, but the new Conductive Tip is. It's optional, so let your prosthetist know that you want this accessory.

Q. Can I wear a glove with my NP device?

A. Yes, there are many creative solutions. Some users prefer wearing a glove under their device while others modify larger gloves to fit overtop.

Q. How long can I wear my NP device?



A. Discuss a wear schedule with your prosthetist and hand therapist for a recommendation based on your situation. After adjusting to it, many people wear their device throughout the day.

Q. Are NP devices covered by insurance?

A. NP devices have been covered by most insurances (i.e., private insurance, worker's compensation, etc.) when billed by a certified prosthetist. NP does not bill insurance directly, but can be a resource for your prosthetist if needed.

Q. How are they cleaned?

A. NP devices are easy to clean. Wash with soap and water just as you wash your hands. A toothbrush will remove excessive dirt after heavy use.

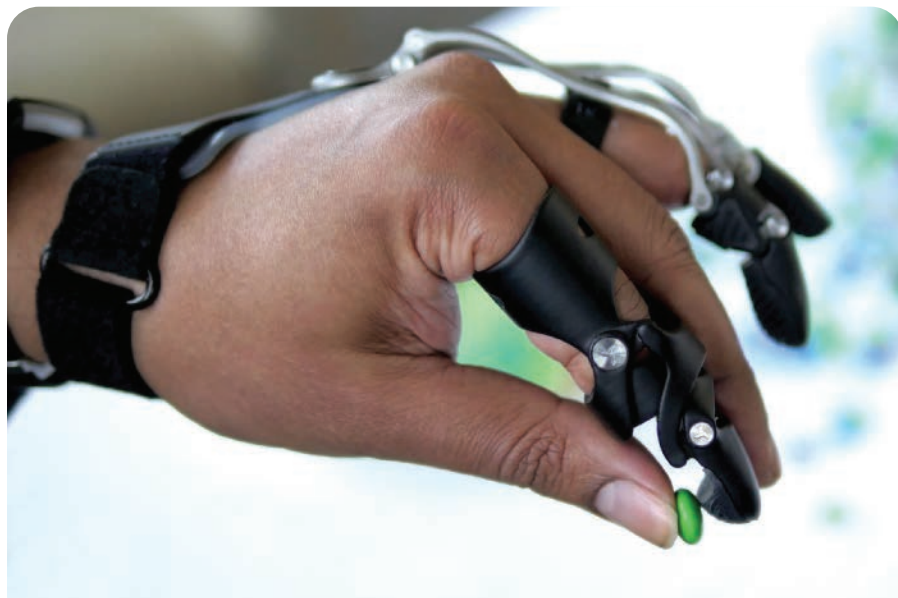
Q. What kind of maintenance is expected? Will I have to oil the device?

A. The PIPDriver, MCPDriver and ThumbDriver are relatively low maintenance. The MCPDriver and ThumbDriver joints may need food-safe mineral oil if you work with degreasers. GripLock Fingers benefit from a monthly application. Some components are considered "wear" items and may need replacing over the life of the device.

Q. Is there a community group for people with partial-hand and finger amputations that I can connect with?

A. Yes. The Finger and Partial Hand Amputee Peer + Support Group on Facebook is always eager to share tips, resources, stories and support.

Naked Prosthetics' Customer Care team can help with assessment, sizing, fitting, and troubleshooting. NP's Clinical Specialists – certified prosthetists and a certified hand therapist – can help with solutions for unique and challenging presentations. Call (888) 977-6693 or 360-915-9724, or email info@npdevices.com for support. More at npdevices.com.



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For Fitness Sake!

By Rouzalin Hakim

“Your adversity
can be the reason
you stop or the
reason you grow.

**YOUR CHOICE,
YOUR OUTCOME.”**

Let’s talk about the age-old question that is always surfacing in our diverse group, ‘to train or not to train?’ But before we dive into the multi-level topic of working out, let me give a little bit of my background and how I found my way to thrive magazine.

If you’re a regular reader of this magazine, you might have read my previous articles. If not, my name is Rouzalin and I am a two-plus-year amputee who has experienced her share of trials and tribulations, dark moments, sleepless nights, and countless tears.

However, I am also the same person who keeps proving to myself just how resilient and driven I am. I’m sure that you’ve felt the same fears and tears, and you are likely just as resilient as me! For me, the only thing that shed the slightest light in the darkest of days was fitness.

I had always been into sports, activity and working out. So, when I lost my leg I was more lost than I had ever imagined I would be. “Can I go back to working out?” I wondered. “Am I doing more damage than good to the rest of my body? Am I more prone to injury now? Where do I start? Which workouts are safe?” I questioned.





And most poignant, “How will it feel to go back into a gym with fully abled people?” I had just survived the most traumatic experience of my life and repeatedly asked myself if being active was really a priority?

I can easily recall returning home from rehab – the pain, the struggle, the insecurities, the exhaustion. I live alone in a three-floor home, so life got real tough real quick as an above-knee amputee.

Early on in my return, I had a bad fall and desperately needed a RMT (Registered Massage Therapist). My RMT was over an hour away and that was a drive I wasn’t capable of handling at that moment. I took myself to the nearest clinic. That day changed my life. Little did I know that that fall was the best thing to happen to me at the time. Attached to this local clinic was a perfectly placed gym.

I don’t remember the massage, but I do remember walking (with my first leg and two crutches) into that gym. That was the first sense of hope that I felt since my accident. As happy as I was, those familiar questions raced in my mind. This was a new place with strange faces in an unfamiliar environment... talk about a rush of anxiety. I figured if I gave it a shot for a week, stayed focused, and visited during quiet times of the day, then I would really see if it was something I could commit to.

Was it easy? Absolutely not. I was just learning how to walk... what was I doing at a gym?

I had a lot of gym experience prior to my accident so my biggest fears weren’t so much about the workout part as much as my insecurities. I was horrified of what people would think, how they would look at me, and how different I looked next to the beautiful girls beside me. This I know for sure – the gym is where everybody looks at every body and mine wasn’t like any of theirs. I now look different, walk differently, have a bionic leg, and I didn’t know what I was capable of doing.

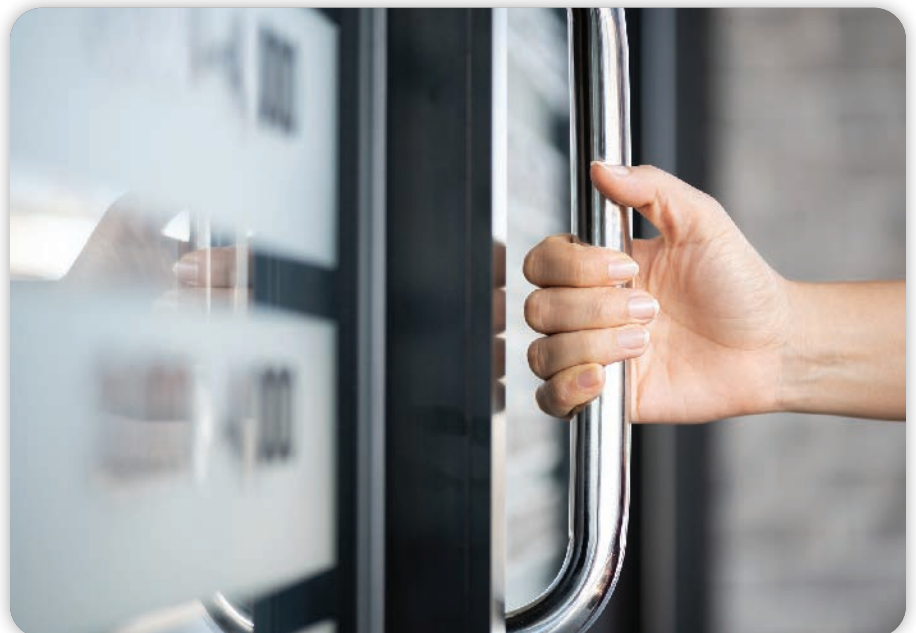
I knew I would be stared at and thought of differently. I really wasn’t

in a good mental state to handle any more emotions but I knew it was something I had to do for myself. I would sit in my car before going in and give myself a pep talk to summon the courage to walk through the door. “Just go in for 30 minutes” I’d bargain with myself.

One day, in my car, as I stared at the gym doors, having my usual “Mazda Meditation”, I wondered to myself: “If I were able-bodied again and saw a person who looked like me get out of a car and open those gym doors to go workout, what would I think?” The answer: I would aspire to have their strength and dedication. I wouldn’t judge them on how they worked out or what they looked like. They would motivate me to work harder.

So, why do we always think people are negatively judging us? Do we all instinctively assume the worst, or is it just me? When you really think about it, why would anyone judge someone else for trying their best?

Today, I can’t even count the number of times that people from my gym have come up to me to tell me how much I motivate them or how they admire me. And some don’t spare me any details, sharing how they were having a bad workout and saw me doing my best which kept them going. Those interactions have





CHANGE
YOUR
MINDSET

completely changed my mindset at the gym and even how I feel when I notice people looking at me in public, away from the gym. Don't get me wrong, I still get some gruesome questions and horrific stares, but I've learned to deal with those differently!

I have now been working out at the gym for over two years. It still has its challenges, but I've come to appreciate... "what doesn't?" I figure, I don't have a perfect day every day at work, but I still go. So why wouldn't I do the same for my body?

I'm not saying that you should join a gym today. What I am saying though, is that attention to our

physical health is crucial. That can vary from anything from yoga to strength training, or walking, hiking or biking. It doesn't matter. But setting a goal and committing to it does matter. Our bodies need to move, and any form of physical activity is beneficial in a multitude of ways like weight loss, strength, balance, recovery, blood circulation, digestion, and mental health too of course!

Try different activities to see what you find most rewarding. My best advice to you would be, whatever your activity of choice, always sign up or consult with a professional for three important reasons: 1) safety, 2) confidence, and 3) accountability.

Starting an activity routine might seem overwhelming. The way I looked at it was... there's always an excuse to be found as to why not to do something and there's always a reason to be had why we should. I hope you team up with a reason, and not an excuse. Your body and mind will thank you for it every time.

Remember, it's not going to be perfect, but it will be worth it.

Regardless of where you are in your journey, if you have questions or simply want to reach out for any reason, contact me at writing2roz@gmail.com.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

As a relatively new amputee (2+ years), working through new emotional and physical challenges informs Rouzalin



Hakim's work as a peer mentor and freelance writer, regularly contributing to *thrive magazine*. She volunteers at trauma centres, and represents her community as an actor, model and podcast guest.

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MOVEMENT *is Medicine*

**MENTAL
WELLNESS**
*through
Recreation*

By Lauren Presutti, MEd, EdS, LLMSW
Mental Health Therapist, River Oaks Psychology

I have always embraced the motto, “work hard, play hard.” I appreciate my dedication to professional goals as a mental health therapist, but my career would certainly crumble to pieces if I did not have outlets for play.



We often think about play as an important part of childhood, but playtime is actually an essential part of our mental wellness throughout our whole lifespan.

Having appropriate outlets for play and recreation at every age is critical because it helps us to manage stress, build relationships, improve our confidence, foster our creativity, and strengthen our social identity.

I'm a firm believer in taking "mental breaks" from our day-to-day responsibilities so that we can practice better self-care and find greater joy through non-productive activities that are simply about having fun... things like connecting with others, feeling fulfilled, and expressing ourselves. Recreational activities alleviate the everyday stresses of life and have been shown to reduce mental health symptoms like anxiety and depression.

But for many people with disabilities, chronic illnesses, or medical conditions of any kind, it can be hard to access recreation without appropriate support and resources. I experienced this firsthand living with a neuromuscular disease. I was diagnosed with a form of muscular dystrophy when I was two years old. I started using my first power wheelchair at age five (it was painted hot pink and I couldn't wait to speed through my neighbourhood!).

I wanted to get out there and play with the rest of the kids, but I frequently experienced barriers that left me wondering where I fit in or if I even belonged with my peers

on the playground. Thankfully, my resourceful family connected me with professionals that taught me how to adapt my environment so that I could experience recreation in accessible ways. I also attended a muscular dystrophy summer camp for many years that helped me develop skills for recreation.

Living in a small town where I felt largely accepted by my community was also helpful, as well as having an outgoing personality. I learned how to educate my non-disabled friends on how they could include me despite my limitations. Because of the support structures I had in place, I was thankfully able to integrate socially into my school and community.

I can barely move my muscles, but I was passionate about throwing myself into mainstream life. In fact, growing up, I often got in trouble whenever I got my wheelchair

STUCK in muddy backyards and soggy fields with my friends! I just wanted to play with everybody else. Our playtime was always worth it.

When I moved away from my small town bubble to attend college, my world changed significantly. I experienced enormous challenges living on my own during college, from needing to employ caregivers to assist me with activities of daily living, navigating barriers around my campus, facing difficulties with classroom accommodations, and overall, just trying to fit in at a large university with people who didn't always understand disability.

Again, I was fortunate to access resources and connect with people who helped me find outlets for recreation and social connections. Most helpful to me was connecting with students at my university who were studying therapeutic recreation. I expressed my interest in trying



“Recreation’s great life lessons: always try new things; push yourself beyond your comfort zone; don’t be afraid to ask for help; and believe in your ability to succeed.”

new things, and for the first time in my life, I learned about all kinds of organized adaptive sports that I had never heard about before. Even more than that, my motivation for adapting all sorts of traditional activities skyrocketed.

With the help of many supportive people, I tried everything from adaptive downhill skiing, power wheelchair soccer, kayaking, horseback riding, roller coasters, para-sailing, and more. Being able to try new things boosted my confidence and inspired me to study abroad during college. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think it would be possible to travel by plane, but with growing confidence I pursued it and traveled with people assisting me.

Through all of these experiences, I learned how much was possible

for my life despite being so severely limited by my muscles. At one point, I even tried riding on a snowmobile by having my friends rig up a way to strap my body to the seat.

There were great life lessons that I took away from all of these experiences: always try new things; push yourself beyond your comfort zone; don’t be afraid to ask for help; and believe in your ability to succeed.

My personal experiences with adaptive recreation, combined with my professional training as a mental health therapist, have given me a unique perspective. There are many people who advocate for disability inclusion, and many people who advocate for mental health awareness, but few people are specialized in the intersection of these areas. Mental health needs of those with disabilities are sometimes

overlooked. It’s often very hard for individuals with disabilities to feel included in society because the world is not designed for disability. Individuals with disabilities are constantly having to adapt themselves to their environments.

Sometimes non-disabled people are unconsciously uncomfortable around people with disabilities. It’s often exhausting for individuals and families affected by disabilities to always have to explain their needs to people who don’t quite understand them, to adapt themselves to the world at large, and to feel an overwhelming sense of difference from the mainstream community. Add to that, disability stigmas and stereotypes are so powerful that it can be hard to build meaningful connections through social outlets. This often leads to feelings of isolation, loneliness, low self-confidence, anxiety and depression.

Recreation can be key to alleviating these challenges. If you or someone you know is experiencing mental exhaustion due to disability-related challenges, loneliness due to feelings of isolation, or depression due to a lack of enjoyment in day-to-day life, I urge you to consider opportunities for recreation.

It doesn’t matter what type of recreation. Everyone has unique needs and interests. It might be an organized adaptive sport or maybe finding accessible trails to hike on. Or maybe you want to find opportunities to engage in arts and crafts. Every single type of recreation – no matter what it is –





can be extremely beneficial for your mental health. For those living with disabilities, recreation is critical to empowerment.

I consider it my passion and purpose in life to bridge the conversation between disability empowerment and mental wellness so that more people with disabilities can establish meaningful connections with others and be included as equal citizens.

How can we create meaningful connections between those with and without disabilities in a way that benefits everyone? Recreation is an excellent starting point, especially when your involvement in recreation offers opportunities to be part of a wider social atmosphere, to build confidence and new skills, and to find feelings of personal joy and fulfillment that lead to stronger relationships.

Article was first published by Recreational Respite. Email info@recrepите.com to learn how Recreational Respite can help you remove barriers to recreation and social connection in your community.

To learn more about author Lauren Presutti and her firm River Oaks Psychology, visit www.riveroakspѕychology.com.

Ethelbert “Curley”

CHRISTIAN

(1883-1954)

Canada’s only surviving quadruple amputee of the First World War, Ethelbert “Curley” Christian’s story is one of courage and triumph, and includes being a pivotal part of The War Amps history.

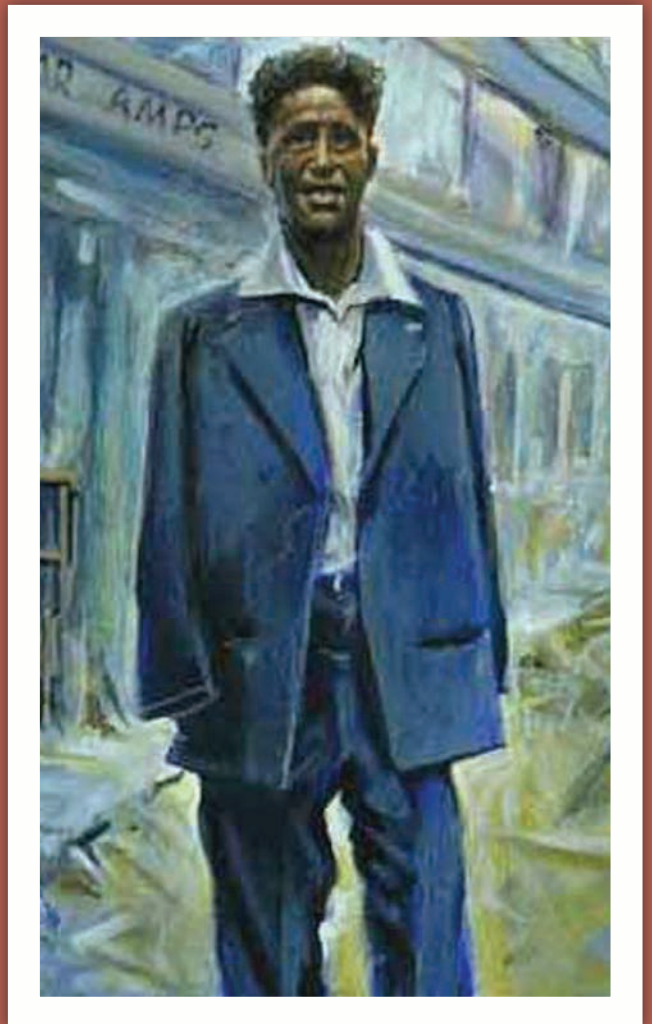
Christian was one of The War Amps founding members and celebrated during Black History Month. He served with the 78th Battalion (Winnipeg Grenadiers). During the Battle of Vimy Ridge, he was wounded when heavy shelling buried him in a trench. With debris crushing all four of his limbs, he laid on the battlefield for two days before being found.

Later, in a French hospital, both of his arms and legs had to be amputated due to gangrene.

While Christian was recovering at Christie Street Veterans Hospital in Toronto, he met his future wife, Cleo MacPherson, who was a volunteer aid. MacPherson noted how costly it was for the government to keep Christian in hospital and felt that she could take care of him at home. However, that would be a full-time job which meant she would be unable to work.

The hospital director appealed to the Canadian government on Christian’s behalf, which led to the creation of the Attendance Allowance, a supplement for full-time caregivers of wounded veterans. This benefit still exists today.

Christian, ever-positive, was among a dedicated group of First World War veterans who welcomed the new contingent of amputees following the Second World War, helping them adapt to life with limb loss.



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This study has received ethics approval from the Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre

Version 2 - NOV. 8, 2023



QR Code to email Study Coordinator

Funding for this study provided by the War Amps



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