The socket is the most important part of your prosthesis. Most sockets are made with flexible, lightweight materials that can bend and expand with your residual limb. There are no pressure points when sockets fit well. This feels comfortable and helps amputees walk more easily.

But when sockets do not fit well, you can have pain, sores, and blisters. Also, your prosthesis might feel very heavy which can cause trouble walking. As a prosthetist, I have heard many people say how tempted they are to leave prostheses in the closet when sockets do not fit well.

Well-fitting prostheses should feel comfortable and help with stability (keep people from falling). But this can be a challenge. Some prosthetists describe this challenge as trying to give stability to a stick (bone) in a bowl of Jell-O (residual tissue).
Make sure sockets fit well

Prosthetic sockets are as unique as the people who use them. They must fit residual limbs that change in terms of volume, shape, and size. Prosthetists can make sockets that adjust for these changes. But the amputee must help by not gaining or losing more than 2 percent of his or her body weight. For instance, a man who weighs 200 pounds should not gain or lose more than 4 pounds.

Sockets also need to take into account where an amputee can bear weight on the residual limb. Prosthetists can make adjustments to the socket or add socks and padding.

Routine socket care

Alignment. Prosthetic sockets, just like cars, need routine care. This includes making sure the prosthesis is in alignment (parts adjusted so that they are in proper position). Proper alignment helps prevent back, hip, and knee problems and should be done every 6 to 12 months. This should be done more often if amputees gain or lose a lot of weight or have changes in muscle mass. New amputees may need alignment once a week.
**Volume change.** Your residual limb will often change volume (when there is more or less fluid). These changes may make your socket feel either very loose or tight. You can manage this by adding extra socks or taking them away. The prosthetist can help you with this.

**Cleaning.** One of the best ways to care for your socket is by cleaning it once a day. This includes cleaning and rinsing the socks and liners. Cleaning helps prevent rash, fungus, redness, and other skin or odor problems. Talk with your prosthetist about ways to care for and clean your socket, socks, and liner.

**Socket Replacement.** You will have more than one socket in your lifetime. When you are a new amputee, you will be fitted with a temporary prosthesis and socket. Then, as the residual limb starts to shrink, you can add extra socks to the socket. Once your residual limb stops changing, you will get a definitive (permanent) socket. This socket may last as long as two to four years. Your doctor, physical therapist or prosthetist will help you decide when to get a new socket. Here are some ways to know when this is needed:

- Your socket is worn out or cracked. Most sockets last up to four years, depending on how active you are.
- Your socket changes color.
• Your socket no longer fits. The most common reason why this happens is that people gain or lose a lot of weight.
• There is a change in the size or shape of your residual limb.
• You have had revision surgery on your residual limb.

To learn more about sockets, prosthetics, and life as an amputee, contact the Amputee Coalition of America (ACA) at www.amputee-coalition.org or call 888/267-5669.

*Translated from* Prosthetic Sockets
*Striking a Fine Balance Between Form and Function*

http://www.amputee-coalition.org/inmotion/sep_oct_06/prosthetic_sockets.html