



CLUB SUPPORT FACTSHEET

SUPPORTING ATHLETES OR RUNNERS WITH RUNNING BLADES

Introduction: this factsheet is designed to help club volunteers understand running blades so they can support their club members.

Most adaptive equipment used in athletics is bespoke and custom made for the individual. Running blades are very specific, plus potentially expensive to purchase and maintain. For example, the cost of a single below knee blade, socket and fitting is £4,000 - £6,000.

State Provision of Blades

At present there is no national prescription for the funding of artificial limbs. Generally, amputees are given two limbs, an everyday limb and a spare limb.

Some artificial limb centres will fund a sports/activity limb and some will not, as they do not have the funding and their focus is on providing limbs for everyday mobility.

Athletes or runners at an artificial limb centre that does not fund sports limbs can:

- a)** ask if they will apply to the Primary Care Trust (PCT) on their behalf for exceptional funding or,
- b)** ask them for a referral to an artificial limb centre which does fund sports limbs.

The decision on funding for a sports limb is generally made by the rehabilitation consultant (for satellite centres this may be different) and is based on a clinical assessment.



Adjustments and Maintenance

The blade and socket will most likely need some adjustments after a period of training. Athletes should be aware of what is included in the original fitting fee and warranty, plus the expected lifespan of the blade.

NHS Servicing

It is assumed that NHS Limb Centres won't have the capacity or funding to service blades bought privately, however this may vary depending on individual circumstances.

For more digital club support, visit the [England Athletics Club Hub](#)



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What is a Clinical Assessment?

The athlete or runner's rehabilitation consultant and prosthetist will meet with them to discuss why they want a sports/activity limb. **They will look at the following factors:**

- 1 Were they involved in the sport/activity they want to pursue prior to the amputation?
- 2 Were they active prior to the amputation?
- 3 Can they prove that if they are given the limb, they will make good use of it?
- 4 Have they tried running on their current limb but are limited by its capability? Can they prove that they are trying to participate/compete in the activity on a limb that does not fulfil the function?
- 5 What is the athlete or runner's current health and activity level? Are they exceeding expectations on their everyday limb, taking on exercise or sporting activities that result in the limb breaking?

If it is the opinion of the multidisciplinary team that the athlete has the potential to resume their sporting activity, then a sporting prosthesis maybe available through the NHS.

This may be funded through the existing contract. Where PCTs or Clinical Commissioning Groups have stipulated that this should be funded through the individual funding panel, an application is made to the panel for separate funding.

If an athlete wants to participate in more than one sport, one limb may be provided through the NHS and for other sporting activities they may have to look for alternative funding, either through charities, insurance claims, medico legal claims, voluntary organisations or employers.

In exceptional circumstances a patient can be funded through the NHS for more than one sporting activity limb.

Hints and Tips

- ✓ The first thing an athlete or runner needs to do is prove a clinical need. They need to research which components would help them overcome the problems they are facing. They can do this by looking at the websites below or talking to the manufacturers.
 - Blatchford www.blatchford.co.uk
 - Opicare www.opicare.co.uk
 - Ossur www.ossur.co.uk
 - OttoBock www.ottobock.co.uk
 - RSLSteeper www.rslsteeper.com
- ✓ The athlete's club should support the application by verifying that they are a club member and the level they are or aspire to compete in.
- ✓ Athletes or runners can request a consultation with a private clinic at their own cost. The clinic will write a report stating whether the athlete will benefit from having the limb.
- ✓ If the athlete is turned down for a running/activity limb, they can ask the rehabilitation consultant/prosthetist for an explanation why.
- ✓ If it is a case of funding, they can ask them to apply to the PCT for "exceptional funding", and they will need to put together a case to prove why they should be given the limb.
- ✓ If they are still refused because the artificial limb centre doesn't have the funds, they can ask their GP for a referral to another limb centre or an independent rehabilitation provider through an "Exceptional Treatment application". Make sure the referral is to a limb centre that has given out sporting/activity limbs
- ✓ See the guidance sheet Primary Care Trust (PCT) Funding for Prosthetic Provision from PACE Rehabilitation, available at www.pacerehab.com/referrals



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Young Athletes

For children, young people and students in full-time education (under 21) there are trusts, charities and grants that may contribute towards the cost of a running blade, often termed 'sporting equipment'. The requirements and guidelines can vary considerably, including means testing, personal contributions and preferred suppliers.

A number of young children are now using smaller blades for school PE and games. These are great for starting in athletics. With growth it is common for athletes to need time out for bone-trimming and adjustments to the blade or socket. Predicted growth and weight gain may also limit the lifespan of the blade.

Leg amputees are eligible to take part in wheelchair racing. Several younger athletes in the UK are now combining both running and wheelchair training in order to maintain fitness and involvement at their local club when they are unable to run.

In competition athletes cannot compete in both running and wheelchair racing at the same event. At international and senior level athletes must choose between ambulant or seated classes – for both track and field events.

Championship, Club, Open & Mass Participation Events

There are no restrictions on running and racing in domestic competitions, road races and open entry events. This also applies to training with local running and athletics groups.

Some road races may include various running surfaces, often using paths, cobbled streets and grass. It is always worth checking with the organiser in advance. Be aware that mass participation races can be very busy in the first part of the race, with lots of pushing and shoving.

Apart from wheelchair racing, it is not common to have separate prize awards for amputees and other ambulant classification groups.



Further advice and guidance

[UK Athletics](#) Paralympic performance pathway

[World Para Athletics](#) Athletes with aspirations of competing internationally should be aware of the current events, classifications and qualification criteria.

[Limb Power](#) support amputees, individuals with limb difference and their families to bridge the gap between hospital rehabilitation and community and school engagement to rebuild lives and improve physical, social and mental well-being.