

## Male-dominated prosthetics industry fails to serve women amputees

When a woman puts on a prosthetic foot or a knee or an arm, she often finds that it's not quite right. Knees are too tall and too stiff, feet don't fit into shoes, hands are big, ankles don't bend to accommodate heels. Every step a female amputee takes puts them face to face with the fact that prosthetics is still a male dominated industry.

It starts at the beginning. Before they even get a device, amputees have to find a prosthetist, a person who they will work with for likely hundreds of hours over their lifetime to find, fit and adjust their device. And that prosthetist not only has to really understand what the patient wants, communicate well, and create and shape devices for the amputee, they also often have to work in private areas.

"When you're an above the knee amputee, the prosthetic socket goes all the way up very high, and it gets very intimate," said Jen Lacey, an amputee advocate who had her left foot and a portion of her leg removed after a motorbike accident. "They're having to poke and prod in that area." The same goes for upper body amputees—sockets often overlap with the breast area.

But finding a female prosthetist isn't always easy. In 2007, [according to the American Board for Certification in Orthotics, Prosthetics, and Pedorthics](#), only 13 percent of the industry was female. Nancy Havlik, a prosthetist who works at Hanger Prosthetics, remembers entering the field when it was even worse.

"When I was in school, there was only one other female with me. In my region there were only two other female practitioners when I started," she said. Havlik came across prosthetics at a career fair, but she wasn't exactly encouraged to pursue it. "I remember walking in in college, and they said 'you're a female, you cannot do this job.' I will never forget that."

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