**USING A CANE – WALKING CANE USER GUIDE**

How to Measure for a Cane

The correct cane length is the key to safe use and better mobility. Many [models of canes](https://justwalkers.com/collections/canes) are adjustable, but it is still helpful to know what the proper length should be.

* Obtain measurements while wearing regular walking shoes.
* Standing upright, allow arms to relax (with normal bend at the elbow) at your sides.
* Have a second person measure the distance from your wrist joint down to the floor. This number is the right length of cane for you.
* An estimate of the proper cane length can be made by dividing an individual’s height by two. For most persons, the right sized cane is within one inch of half their height. This guideline can be applied if the user is not available for an actual measurement.

**Proper Use of a Cane**

To walk safely with a cane on level surfaces:

* Hold the cane in the hand on your “good” side so that it provides support to the opposite lower limb.
* Take a step with the “bad” leg and bring the cane forward at the same time. Move the cane and affected leg forward together.
* Lean your weight through the arm holding the cane as needed.
* Always have the bad leg assume the first full weight-bearing step on level surfaces.
* The cane should be moved the distance of one average step forward with each move. You should not feel that you are stretching to catch up to the cane or stepping ahead of it.
* If you are using the cane for general mobility rather than an injury, hold the cane using your dominant hand and bear weight on this side of your body. If you are working with a physical therapist due to an injury, he or she may have a specific cane-walking plan different from this one.

**Managing Steps with a Cane**

* To properly ascend stairs, it is “up with the good.” While holding onto the rail with one hand, advance the stronger leg first placing it on the step above where you are standing. After this good leg is appropriately placed on the step, advance the weaker leg up to the same step that the stronger leg is on. If there is no rail to hold on to, the cane is placed on the upper step at the same time or after placement of the weaker leg.
* To properly descend stairs, it is “down with the bad.” While holding onto the rail with one hand, advance the weaker leg first placing it on the step below where you are standing. After this affected leg is appropriately placed on the step, advance the stronger leg down to the same step that the weaker leg is on. If there is no rail to hold on to, the cane is placed on the lower step at the same time or after placement of the stronger leg.

**Using a walker**

It is important to start walking soon after a leg injury or surgery. But you will need support while your leg is healing. A walker can give you support as you start to walk again.

There are many types of walkers.

Some walkers have no wheels, 2 wheels, or 4 wheels.

You can also get a walker with brakes, a carrying basket, and a sitting bench.

Any walker you use should be easy to fold so that you can transport it easily.

Your surgeon or physical therapist will help you choose the type of walker that is best for you.

**Walker Basics**

* If your walker has wheels, you will push it forward to move forward. If your walker does not have wheels, then you will need to lift it and place it in front of you to move forward.
* All 4 tips or wheels on your walker need to be on the ground before you put your weight on it.
* Look forward when you are walking, not down at your feet.
* Use a chair with armrests to make sitting and standing easier.
* Make sure your walker has been adjusted to your height. The handles should be at the level of your hips. Your elbows should be slightly bent when you hold the handles.
* Ask your health care provider for help if you are having problems using your walker.

**How to Walk with Your Walker**

**Follow these steps to walk with your walker:**

* Push or lift your walker a few inches, or a few centimeters, or an arm's length in front of you.
* Make sure all 4 tips or wheels of your walker are touching the ground before taking a step.
* Step forward with your weak leg first. If you had surgery on both legs, start with the leg that feels weaker.
* Then step forward with your other leg, placing it in front of the weaker leg.
* Repeat steps 1 through 4 to move forward. Go slowly and walk with good posture, keeping your back straight.

**Going from Sitting to Standing**

**Follow these steps when you get up from a sitting position:**

Place the walker in front of you with the open side facing you.

Make sure all 4 tips or wheels of your walker are touching the ground.

**Instructions on How to Use Crutches**

* Before you begin using crutches, your doctor, nurse, or physical therapist will show you how to adjust the crutches, so they are the right height for you. If a patient has never used a crutch, they should not do so without instructions and ideally, to be safe, a trained assistant.
* To begin walking with crutches,

1. gradually shift your weight to your healthy leg.
2. Move the crutches in front of you to a point at which you can maintain stability.
3. For the swing movement, shift your weight from your healthy leg to your arms, swinging your body through the crutches as the crutches take up the weight.
4. Plant your healthy leg at a point ahead, again maintaining stability, and shift your weight back to the leg.
5. Then move the crutches forward to repeat the movement.

* Studies have shown that your wrist receives from one to more than three times your body weight during the swing phase of walking with crutches -- a load the upper body was not designed to sustain.
* Never support yourself on your armpits. Hold the handgrips for support.
* While standing, place the crutches 8 in-10 in in front of you.
* While walking, do not try to move too quickly or to cover too long a distance with each step. Keep the crutches close to your body.
* Generally, people use a swinging gait, where the crutches are advanced and stabilized then the [feet](https://www.emedicinehealth.com/feet_facts_quiz_iq/quiz.htm) swung through after stabilization of the crutches has occurred.
* While using them on stairs, have someone assist you.
* While going down stairs, place the crutches on the next step below, then step down with the good leg.
* While going up stairs, step up with the good leg first, then bring the crutches up.
* If using just one crutch, techniques for walking start with placing the crutch under the arm opposite your weaker leg. Move the crutch and your weaker leg forward at the same time. Then take a step with your stronger leg.
* You may struggle with how to make crutches more comfortable. Crutch comfort can become an issue, as your body acclimates to their use. Cushioned covers or pads for the underarm and handgrip areas may be purchased.
* Lean slightly forward and use your arms to help you stand up. DO NOT pull on or tilt the walker to help you stand up. Use the chair armrests or handrails if they are available. Ask for help if you need it.
* Grab the handles of the walker.
* You may need to take a step forward to stand up straight.
* Before starting to walk, stand until you feel steady and are ready to move forward.

**Going from Standing to Sitting**

**Follow these steps when you sit down:**

* Back up to your chair, bed, or toilet until the seat touches the back of your legs.
* Make sure all 4 tips or wheels of your walker are touching the ground.
* Reach back with one hand and grab the armrest, bed, or toilet behind you. If you had surgery on both legs, reach back with one hand, then the other hand.
* Lean forward and move your weaker leg forward (the leg you had surgery on).
* Slowly sit down and then slide back into position.
* Stepping Up or Down a Step or Curb

**When you go up or down stairs:**

* Place your walker on the step or curb in front of you if you are going up. Place it beneath the step or curb if you are going down.
* Make sure all four tips or wheels are touching the ground.
* To go up, step up with your strong leg first. Place all your weight on the walker and bring your weaker leg up to the step or curb. To go down, step down with your weaker leg first. Place all your weight on the walker. Bring your strong leg down next to your weaker leg.

**Safety Tips**

* When walking, start with your weaker leg. If you had surgery, this is the leg you had surgery on.
* When going up a step or curb, start with your stronger leg. When going down a step or curb, start with the weaker leg: "Up with the good, down with the bad."
* Keep space between you and your walker and keep your toes inside your walker. Stepping too close to the front or tips or wheels may make you lose your balance.
* Make changes around your house to [prevent falls](https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000052.htm):
* Make sure any loose rugs, rug corners that stick up, or cords are secured to the ground, so you do not trip or get tangled in them.
* Remove clutter and keep your floors clean and dry.
* Wear shoes or slippers with rubber or other non-skid soles. DO NOT wear shoes with heels or leather soles.
* Check the tips and wheels of your walker daily and replace them if they are worn. You can get replacements at your medical supply store or local drug store.
* Attach a small bag or basket to your walker to hold small items so that you can keep both hands on your walker.
* DO NOT try to use stairs and escalators unless a physical therapist has trained you how to use them with your walker.