Patient Handout

Canes and Walkers

Which One is Right For You?

There are many types of canes, walkers, and other assistive devices available. If you feel you need a cane or walker, talk to your doctor and/or a physical therapist to make sure you get the product that is best for you.

Canes

Canes provide support and balance and may help some people avoid falls.

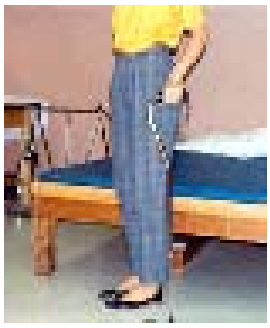
- You can support up to **25%** of your weight with a cane.
- Typical reasons for using a cane:
  - — Arthritis, especially of the knees and hips
  - — Mild balance disorders
  - — Injuries to the foot or leg

Walkers

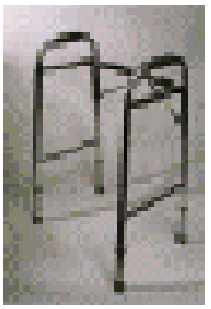
Walkers provide support and balance and may help some people avoid falls.

- You can support up to **50%** of your weight with a walker.
- Typical reasons for using a walker:
  - Arthritis, especially of the knees and hips
  - Moderately severe balance and gait disorders
  - Generalized weakness of hips and legs
- In most cases, canes and walkers are reimbursable through Medicare and other insurers.

Canes



Walkers



For more information on The AGS Foundation for Health in Aging call 1-800-563-4916 or visit www.healthinaging.org.

This handout is excerpted from the Falls in Older Adults Primary Care Practice Toolkit developed by the Practicing Physician Education Project which was supported by a grant from the John A. Hartford Foundation through the American Geriatrics Society.

Patient Handout

Choosing a Cane

How to Get a Proper Fit for Your Cane

The correct length of a cane is measured from the wrist to the floor. To measure for a cane:

- Wear your normal shoes.
- Hold your arm with a 20-degree to 30-degree bend in the elbow.
- Ask someone else to measure the distance from your wrist to the floor. This measurement should be about equal to the distance from the point where your leg bone fits into the hip socket to the floor.
- If necessary, adjust the cane to match your measurement.

Wood canes can be cut with a small saw. Remove the rubber tip, measure the cane from the top edge of the handle to the desired length, cut the cane, and replace the rubber tip.

Aluminum canes are adjusted by pushing the button in and sliding the tube to the new length until the button locks in place.

Using Your Cane Safely

Unless instructed otherwise, use the cane on the **opposite side** of your injury or weakness. For safe use of your cane:

1. Put all of your weight on your unaffected leg, and then move the cane and your affected leg a comfortable distance forward.
2. With your weight supported on both your cane and your affected leg, step through with your unaffected leg.
3. Place your cane firmly on the ground before you take a step. Do not place your cane too far ahead of you, or it could slip from under you.
4. Non-skid rubber tips help keep you from slipping. Checks tips often and change them if they look worn. These tips are available through your local pharmacy or medical supply store
5. If your cane does not feel right, ask your physician or physical therapist to check the fit.

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Patient Handout

Choosing a Walker

How to Get a Proper Fit for Your Walker

The correct height of a walker is measured from the wrist to the floor. To measure for a walker:

- Wear your normal shoes and hold your arm with a 20-degree to 30-degree bend in the elbow. (If your upper arm is at 12 o'clock, your hand points to 5 o'clock.)
- Ask someone else to measure the distance from your wrist to the floor. This measurement should be about equal to the distance from the point where your leg bone fits into the hip socket to the floor.
- If necessary, adjust the walker to match your measurement. Most walkers are adjusted by pushing in buttons on each side and sliding the tubing to the new length until the buttons lock in place.
- If your walker doesn't feel right, ask your physician or physical therapist to check the fit.

Using Your Walker Safely

For safe use of your walker:

1. Roll your walker a step's length ahead of you. Place the walker firmly on the ground. Do not place your walker too far ahead of you, or it could slip from under you.
2. Lean slightly forward and hold the arms of the walker for support.
3. Take a step.
4. Repeat the cycle: Place your walker firmly on the ground (or roll it ahead of you), then take a step.
5. Non-skid rubber tips help keep you from slipping. Checks tips often and change them if they look worn. (On carpeted surfaces, tennis balls cut and placed on the rubber tips can be helpful for ease of movement.)

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