

How to Use Canes and Walkers

How do I know if I would benefit from using a cane or walker?

If you have one leg that is painful or weak and makes it hard to walk or keep your balance, a cane might help. If you have poor balance or feel unsteady on your feet, a walker might be better. The type of cane or walker that is best for you depends on your strength, fitness level, and balance. Ask your doctor for help choosing the best one for you.

How can I tell if my cane or walker is the right height?

The top of your cane or walker should be at the level of your wrist when you are standing with your arms relaxed at your side. If it is higher or lower than this, ask your doctor to adjust the height, if possible, or recommend a new size.

How do I use the cane or walker correctly?

When using a cane, your elbow should be slightly bent. Hold the cane in the hand opposite the leg that is painful or weak. Move the cane forward at the same time as that leg. When you are walking up stairs, your good leg should go up first, followed by

the weak leg and cane. When you are walking down stairs, the weak leg and cane should go first, followed by your good leg. One way to remember this is the phrase, “Up with the good, down with the bad.”

When using a walker, both feet should stay between the walker’s back legs. Take your time when turning. Do not lift the walker off the ground while turning.

Ask your doctor to watch you walk with your cane or walker to make sure you are using it correctly. With both a cane and a walker, you should try to stand up straight without leaning forward or to one side.

What if I still don’t feel steady on my feet?

Physical therapy may help if you need to work on your muscle strength, walking, or balance. A physical therapist can help your doctor choose the right cane or walker for you and show you how to use it correctly. Your doctor can refer you for physical therapy at an office or sometimes in your home.

Resources to help prevent falls are available at <https://www.cdc.gov/steady/>.

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