

If you are in pain or have had an operation, you may be advised to use a walking stick, crutches (one or two) or a walking frame. The aim is to decrease your pain levels, assist healing and make it safer for you to move around.

It can take some time to get used to using an aid and there are some things you can do to help make it safer for you:

- ✓ Ensure your home is clutter-free and any trip hazards (such as electrical wires and rugs) are reduced as much as is possible.
- ✓ Try to have clear pathways between rooms.
- ✓ Ensure that areas are well lit - particularly the stairs and from your bedroom to the bathroom.
- ✓ It may be necessary to install some additional features at home including grab rails and a raised toilet seat.
- ✓ Use non-slip bath mats and consider a bath/shower seat.

Most people find that they become accustomed to their new aids very quickly.

## Elbow crutches

Crutches are generally used in the shorter term either before an operation or to help recovery afterwards. It is important that these have been well maintained and the screws and rubber feet (ferrules) are in good working order. Two crutches will usually be advised where decreased weight bearing is recommended. One crutch is usually used as a progression when there is no limit to weight bearing.



A Physiotherapist should do the fitting of your crutches. However, you can check yours are set to the right height by checking the following:

- ✓ The upper plastic arm cuff should be around your forearm with your hand coming through to position on the hand rest. The hand rest should be in line with the wrist crease when the hand is relaxed and hanging down.
- ✓ There should be a slight bend at the elbow (around 30 degrees).



## Walking sticks

Walking sticks are generally considered to provide more stability and be more comfortable than crutches. They are therefore more beneficial for longer-term use.

- ✓ When setting the height of your sticks, the top of the stick should be in line with your wrist crease when your arm is relaxed and hanging down.

## How to use your crutches/walking sticks

How much weight you should put through your crutches/sticks will be individual to your condition/surgery and your Surgeon or Physiotherapist will advise you on this.

- ✓ Ensure that you take small steps.
- ✓ Sticks should be held with the top facing backwards.
- ✓ Maintain an upright posture to reduce strain on the neck and back.

- ✓ Where two crutches/sticks are used, the bad leg should remain level with the crutches. Move the crutches forward a short way first then move your bad leg to meet the crutches, followed by the good leg. As you get more confident you can place your injured leg down at the same time as the crutches/sticks.
- ✓ Alternatively, you may be instructed to walk using an alternate walking pattern with two crutches if you need more support or have low energy levels. In this case you put the crutch or stick down at the same time as the opposite leg and repeat on the other side. You may wish to start by putting the crutch/stick down first then moving the leg to meet it. This is the slowest way of walking but also uses the least energy.
- ✓ Where one crutch/stick is used it should be used on the OPPOSITE side to your injured/operated leg. The crutch/stick will be placed on the floor at the same time as your injured leg so that some of the weight is taken through the walking aid.
- ✓ When **rising from a chair**, use your hands on the arms of your chair. Do not rest your weight on the stick to pull yourself up. The sticks or crutches can be left near the arm of the chair so that they are easily in reach when you get up. When sitting back down, put your back to the chair and move backwards until the chair hits the back of your legs. Move your hands to the arm rests so that you can ensure you will be sitting in the centre of the chair.
- ✓ When encountering **stairs**, use a hand-rail if possible. Move both of the crutches/sticks into the other hand. Your physiotherapist will teach you how to hold them both together (if you have two). When going
  - **UP** the stairs, the good leg should always lead, followed by the injured leg and lastly the crutch. You can remember this using the synonym **ABC (Able leg, Bad leg, Crutch)**. When going
  - **DOWN** the stairs, the opposite technique is applied - start with the crutch, followed by the injured leg and the good leg coming last.

## References

1. <http://orthoinfo.aaos.org/topic.cfm?topic=A00181>
2. [http://www.walkeasy.com/interact/crutch\\_gait2.asp](http://www.walkeasy.com/interact/crutch_gait2.asp) - you can see videos of how to use your crutches/sticks here.
3. <http://www.physioadvisor.com.au/health/injury-rehabilitation/how-to-use-crutches/>
4. <https://pathways.nice.org.uk/pathways/osteoarthritis/management-of-osteoarthritis#content=view-node%3Anodes-non-pharmacological-treatments>
5. <http://www.livingmadeeasy.org.uk/mobility%20and%20walking/walking-sticks-1965/>