

Medical Appliances

**SPECIAL
POINTS OF
INTEREST:**

- **How to Choose and Use a Walker**
- **How to Choose and Use a Cane**

The information in these articles are not intended to take the place of formal assessment of a person's situations or abilities.

Caregivers should always receive instructions from a healthcare provider before implementing the instructions given here.

How to Choose and Use a Walker

Walkers benefit those with impaired balance, weakness, pain or poor endurance. Here's help for selecting and maneuvering one properly:

Understand the options.

There are two main types of walkers: standard, which has no wheels; and rolling, which has wheels. In general, the standard walker provides more stability but tends to require more energy. Rolling walkers are more energy efficient and allow for a more normal walking pattern. A physical therapist can advise on the type of walker best suited to the person. Rolling walkers come with two or four wheels, which may be fixed or swivel, and a variety of wheel diameters. Typically, rolling walkers with fixed 5" wheels on the front legs are recommended. In order to help the walker slide more easily over the ground, either "glides" or tennis balls can be placed over the rubber caps of the rear legs. Glides are more helpful on carpet, whereas tennis balls are better for wood or tile surfaces but wear out quickly if the walker is used outdoors.

Adjust the height.

It is important to adjust the walker properly to the height of the person using it. To do this, have the person stand with arms resting at their sides and adjust it so the handles are at the height of the person's wrist. When hands are on the walker, the user's elbows should be slightly bent.

Teach proper sequencing.

Generally, the standard walker is advanced by picking it up and placing it back down so the rear legs of the walker are approximately in line with the person's toes. (Remind the user not to let the walker get too far ahead.) Next, the user should advance the weaker or more painful leg, followed by the stronger or less painful leg. If there is neither weakness nor pain, the person should simply take two steps after advancing the standard walker as described above and repeat; if using a rolling walker the user would push the walker ahead so the back legs line up with their toes, take two

steps and repeat, or push and walk continuously as if pushing a shopping cart.

Walker Special

Considerations:

Look for a folding option. This improves ease of both storage and transport. Check the weight capacity. Most walkers have a 250 or 300 pound maximum. However, there are walkers designed for those who are over 300 pounds.

Let attachments help! A variety of baskets, trays and bags have been designed to attach to walkers for carrying handbags, books, and other items. When using one, be sure it is attached correctly, follow the manufacturer's instructions on proper use and avoid overloading.

Accommodate special needs. If your loved one has a cardiac or pulmonary condition, they may benefit from the use of a rollator. This is a specially designed walker with extra features such as a basket to carry a portable oxygen tank and a seat that folds up and down to allow for rest if the person becomes tired.



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How to Choose and Use a Cane

Here's How:

Consider the functionality of the cane, not only it's appearance.

Select from the various styles of canes by considering the stability each offers.

Choose a cane that is light.

To select the proper length for a cane, stand up straight with your shoes on and arms at your sides. The top of the cane should reach the crease on the under side of your wrist.

If the cane is a proper fit, your elbow will be flexed 15-20 degrees when you hold the cane while standing.

Choose an adjustable cane if you plan to wear different styles of shoes.

Make sure you have a good grip of the cane and the fingers and thumb do not overlap.

Shift as much weight to the cane as necessary.

Make sure the tip of the cane is in good condition and it is replaceable.

Hold the cane with the opposite hand of the side that needs extra support.

When ascending stairs, step first with the cane and good foot following with the bad side.

When descending stairs, step first with the bad foot and follow the cane and good foot.

Tips:

Always take your cane with you.

Keep your free hand on the railing when going up or down stairs.

With a written prescription from your doctor, most health insurance will cover the cost of a cane or walker.



Information for *How to Choose and Use a Walker* came from the Caring Today website: <http://www.caringtoday.com/deal-with/walker-basics>

Information about *How to Choose and Use a Cane* came from the website: <http://arthritis.about.com/cs/assist/ht/cane.htm>

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