

Choosing the Right Cane or Walker

Canes and walkers provide support and balance and may help some people avoid falls. There are many types of canes, walkers, crutches and other assistive devices available. Some are simple and plain, while others may be enhanced to have wheels or even a basket to help carry items.

Whatever your healthcare needs include, you should be able to find the right walking assistant device to help you. Not only is it important to choose the correct type of walking aid, but you should make sure you're fitted for the device and trained by a professional on how to use it properly. In most cases, canes and walkers are reimbursable through Medicare and other insurers.



For more information, download our free Tip Sheet on Falls Prevention available at Healthinaging.org.

Which Should I Choose? If you feel you need a cane or walker, talk to your healthcare provider to make sure you get the device that is best for you. When deciding between a cane or walker, discuss the following questions with your healthcare provider:

	Canes	Walkers
How much of your weight does the device need to support?	You can support up to 25% of your weight with a cane	You can support up to 50% of your weight with some walkers
What is your typical reason for using the device?	Reasons for using a cane may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Arthritis (especially of the knees and hips) ■ Mild balance problems ■ Injuries to the foot or leg 	Reasons for using a walker may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Arthritis (especially of the knees and hips) ■ Moderately severe balance and gait problems ■ Generalized weakness of hips and legs
How is the device structured?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Canes may be made of wood or aluminum ■ All must have a non-skid rubber tip ■ Some have curved, rounded or grip handles ■ Can be single-, triple- or quad-footed, which can provide a variety of stability levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Walkers are generally made of aluminum and should have rubber grips for your hands so that they don't slip ■ Three types of walkers include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Front-wheeled walkers (must have non-skid tips on the back legs) 2. Rolling 4-wheeled walker (with or without seat) 3. Standard pick-up walker

How to Get a Proper Fit for Your Cane or Walker

The correct length of a cane or walker is measured from the wrist to the floor.

To measure:

- Wear your normal shoes.
- Let your arm hang loosely at your side.
- 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.
- Have your cane or walker adjusted to that distance.
 - 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.
 - Wood canes can be cut to size. Aluminum canes are adjusted by pushing the button in and sliding the tube to the new length until the button locks in place.
- Put your hand on the cane or walker handle. If the length is correct, you will notice 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.)



If your cane or walker does not feel right, ask your physician or physical therapist to check the fit.

5 'Steps' to Safely Using Your Cane

- 1 Unless instructed otherwise, use the cane on the opposite side of your injury or weakness.
- 2 Put all of your weight on your unaffected leg.
- 3 Move the cane and your affected leg a comfortable distance forward.
- 4 With your weight supported on both your cane and your affected leg, step through with your unaffected leg.
- 5 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.

5 'Steps' to Safely Using Your Walker

- 1 Roll or lift your walker a step's length ahead of you.
- 2 Place the walker firmly on the ground. Do not place your walker too far ahead of you, or it could slip from under you.
- 3 Lean slightly forward, and hold the arms of the walker for support.
- 4 Take a step.
- 5 Repeat the cycle: Place your walker firmly on the ground (or roll it ahead of you), then take a step.

Get Non-Skid Rubber Tips for Your Cane or Walker

Non-skid rubber tips help keep you from slipping. Check tips often and change them if they look worn. These tips are available through your local pharmacy or medical supply store.

On carpeted surfaces, tennis balls cut and placed on the rubber tips can be helpful for ease of movement.