

Choosing The Right Cane Or Walker

Canes and walkers can help people with pain, weakness, and balance problems walk more safely and comfortably. They may also help some people avoid falling. There are many different types of canes, walkers, and other assistive devices available, so it's very important to:

- Work with a healthcare provider (physical therapist, health care provider, or nurse) to choose the correct type of walking aid for you
- Make sure the cane or walker fits you correctly
- Get help learning how to use it the right way

In most cases, canes and walkers can be reimbursable through Medicare and other insurers if certain health criteria are met.

Which Cane or Walker Should I Choose?

If you are having trouble walking or getting around, a cane or walker may help.

Talk with your healthcare provider and make sure to share any struggle you might be having. This way, your provider can discuss your needs and make sure you get the device that is best for you. When deciding between a cane or walker, discuss the following points with your healthcare provider:

	Canes	Walkers
What is the main reason you need the device?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Arthritis or pain, especially of the knees and hips, and on one side■ Mild balance problems■ Injuries to one foot or leg	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Arthritis or pain (especially of the knees and hips) on both sides■ More significant balance and gait problems■ Weakness especially in the legs
How much of your weight does the device need to support?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ You can support up to 25% of your weight with a cane.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ You can support half (or more) of your weight with a walker.
Most common types	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Single point canes can help with mild balance or walking problems.■ Hiking pole (s) can be used for light balance and walking issues either in one hand or both.■ Some canes and hiking poles fold up for taking with you "in case".■ Quad canes or canes with attached seats are not ideal for most people because they don't offer optimal stability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Standard walkers (with four legs and without wheels) are typically used indoors. They need to be picked up to move forward and are the most stable walker.■ Front-wheeled walkers (with 2 front wheels) roll but are less stable.■ 4-wheeled walkers often come with baskets, seats, bigger wheels, and brakes, making them more mobile outside but they require more control to use.

Canes

Other things to think about

- All canes must have a non-skid rubber tip.
- Curved, rounded, or grip handles help with balance and to lower stress on your hand.
- Canes are not as stable as walkers.

Walkers

- Front-wheeled walkers must have nonskid tips on the back legs.
- Rolling walkers are heavier (15-30 lbs) and can be harder to travel with.
- Walkers work best on level ground vs. grass, stairs, etc.

How to Get a Proper Fit for Your Cane or Walker

You do not need to see a healthcare provider to be 'fitted' for a cane or a walker but it is important to make sure you know how to choose an option that is the correct fit. To measure:

1. Adjust to wrist height

The walker or cane handle should be about the height of your wrists when your arms are hanging at your sides.

2. Arms should be slightly bent

When using a walker or cane, your arms should be slightly bent.

3. Stand tall

You shouldn't have to bend forward at the waist to reach your walker or cane.

Note: Hiking poles are typically held higher. Elbows should be at least a right angle or a little greater.

▶ **If your cane or walker does not feel right, ask your healthcare provider to check the fit.**

5 Steps to Safely Using Your Cane

1. Use the cane on the opposite side of your injury, pain, or weakness (unless your healthcare provider tells you differently).
2. Move the cane and your bad leg at the same time for a comfortable distance forward.
3. Step through with your good leg.
4. Do not place your cane too far ahead of you
5. Try to walk normally while putting light pressure on the cane as it moves in step with your bad leg.

6 Steps to Safely Using Your Walker

1. Stand with your feet halfway between the front and back tips or wheels.
2. Roll or lift your walker a step length ahead of you. Do not place your walker too far ahead of you or it becomes less stable.
3. Lean slightly forward and hold the arms of the walker for support.
4. Take a step.
5. Repeat the cycle.
6. When getting up from a chair and using a walker, use the chair to push up from and use the walker to stabilize. Do not pull or push on the walker itself to help rise up from a chair.



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The AGS Health in Aging Foundation is dedicated to improving the health, independence, and quality of life of all older people. We aim to empower older adults and caregivers to actively participate in their health care and decision-making.

DISCLAIMER: This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other healthcare provider. Always consult your healthcare provider about your medications, symptoms, and health problems. July 2024

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