

Tips for crutches and the correct use of walkers



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Anyone standing up for the first time after an operation on the leg or hip needs an underarm walking support. In the clinic these are usually provided, otherwise they can be obtained from a medical supplies store or local home care association with a prescription from your doctor.

Use your supports even if you would actually rather walk. The support not only takes the strain off your joint, it is also a signal to the people around you, who then automatically take more care around you. This reduces the risk of you being accidentally jostled and falling.

When selecting and using crutches, the following points should be observed:

- The **right height** is worked out by the rule of thumb: where the hipbone can be felt most prominently is where the handle of the crutch should be. If in doubt, have one of the nursing staff or your physiotherapist set the exact height, he or she can also check your gait
- The (anatomical) **hand grips** should be made of a soft material so as to provide a firm grip. At the same time the full width of the hand must be able to rest comfortably so that no painful pressure points develop. If you have problems with the hand grips, wrap gauze bandage around them or wear padded, fingerless «biker gloves» for longer distances.
- Support yourself securely on the hand grips of your crutches when walking. The elbows should be slightly bent (never completely straighten as this overstrains the elbow joint).
- Bear your weight on your hands, not your underarms.
- Keep your hips as straight as possible and avoid extreme inward and outward movements.
- After a joint operation you should not bend too low or go down on your haunches. If you drop a crutch, ask someone to pick it up for you or use the underarm support of the other crutch to «fish» whilst holding the other end of it.
- When climbing stairs, keep one hand on the handrail of the banister for support and carry the crutch in the other hand by holding it horizontally, parallel to the hand grip.
- Get yourself a rucksack as shopping bag. This means that you have both hands free and can walk safely and comfortably.
- The **rubber foot** or stopper on used crutches provided for you should definitely be made of nonslip rubber with enough tread to provide a secure grip on the floor. Check this and if necessary insist that the stopper be replaced.
- When standing, both sticks should be placed slightly in front of and by the side of your feet.
- To put a crutch down without dropping it, lean it upside-down against the wall (rubber foot sat the top).