

CHOOSING AND USING CANES



Patient: Why do I need a cane doctor?

Doctor: A cane can improve your balance as you walk or help you compensate for an injury or disability.

Patient: How do I know which one to choose?

Doctor: If you need the cane only for balance, consider a standard cane with a single tip. If you need the cane to bear weight, you might choose an offset cane with four tips.

Patient: How will I know which is the right grip for me?

Doctor: Generally, choosing a grip is a matter of personal preference. Consider a foam grip or a grip that's shaped to fit your hand. If you have trouble grasping with your fingers — because of arthritis or other joint pains — you might prefer a larger grip. Choosing the correct grip will relieve unnecessary stress on your joints and help prevent joint deformities. Numbness or pain in your hand or fingers might signal that your cane's grip isn't a good fit for your hand.

Patient: How can I make sure that the cane fits me?

Doctor: Many canes are adjustable, but some are not. To make sure your cane fits you properly:

1. Check your elbow bend. With the cane in your hand, your elbow should bend at a comfortable angle, about 15 degrees. You might bend your elbow slightly more if you're primarily using the cane for balance.
2. Check your wrist height. With your arm hanging straight down at your side, the top of your cane should line up with the crease in your wrist.

Patient: How do I use the cane correctly while walking?

Doctor: If you use a cane for stability, you may grip it in either hand — whichever feels most comfortable. Pick up and move your cane in unison with the opposite leg. Don't place your cane too far ahead of you. If you have an injury or disability affecting your hip, knee or ankle, your doctor or physical therapist might recommend a specific walking pattern. For example, you might hold the cane in the opposite hand of the affected leg and move the cane in unison with the affected leg. Each time you step with the affected leg, move the cane, too — to give you support as you walk. When you step forward with the unaffected leg, keep the cane in place.

Patient: How should I use the cane when climbing and going down the stairs?

Doctor: Be careful when using steps with a cane. If you have an injury or disability affecting one leg, grasp the railing — if possible — and step up with your unaffected leg first. Then step up with your other leg as you move the cane. To move down steps, put your cane on the lower step first, then your affected leg and then your other leg — which carries your body weight.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE:

1. Without looking at the script above, instruct your patient on how to use the cane using your own words.
2. When should you use a cane, walker, and crutches?