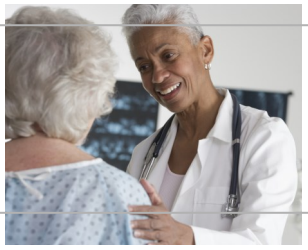
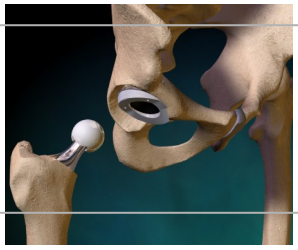
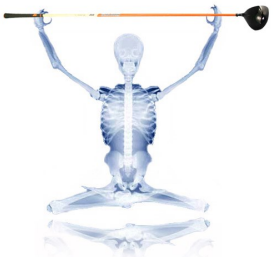



Walking Aids for

HIP AND KNEE REPLACEMENT PATIENTS



How to *fit* and *safely use* your walker, cane and crutches after surgery

ALBERTA BONE & JOINT INSTITUTE HEALTH
www.albertaboneandjoint.com

Covenant Health
www.covenanthealth.ca

Alberta Health Services
www.albertahealthservices.ca

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Introduction

The walking aids you will use after your hip or knee replacement are very important tools for your successful recovery from surgery. Whether you are going to use crutches, a cane, a walker or all of these aids, making sure they are fitted properly for you and using them the right way will make getting around easier and safer.

Walking, sitting down, standing up, going up and down stairs – these are simple activities that must be done safely with the help of walking aids. You must learn to do these everyday activities without putting more weight on your operated leg than you can tolerate or than allowed by your surgeon.

Your physical therapist will teach you to use your walking aids safely. It is important that you continue to use them until your surgeon or physical therapist tells you they are no longer needed.

It is best to have your walking aids 1 to 2 weeks **before** your surgery so that you can practice using them. Practicing ahead of time will help you to manage more easily and safely once you return home from the hospital.

Remember – make safety your main concern. Remove loose mats and rugs, electric cords and cables that could cause you to trip or slip in your home.

Most walking aids can be bought or rented from a medical and surgical supply store. These stores are listed in the Yellow Pages phone book or online at www.yellowpages.ca under Home Health Care Supplies. To save shopping around, you can buy crutches at the hospital on the day you arrive for surgery, unless you need special crutches for your height or weight. Many pharmacies rent crutches and walkers. In some areas, walking aids can be borrowed through a medical equipment loan program.

If you plan to borrow walking aids from friends or family, make sure they are in good working order and safe, and are the right type for your height and weight.

The information in this booklet is of a general nature. Some of this information may not apply to you if you have special needs or circumstances. Talk to your physician or other appropriate health care professional if you have any concerns or questions.

Please bring this booklet with you when you visit the Hip and Knee Replacement Clinic, attend therapy sessions and go to the hospital.

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Know Your Weight Limit

Your doctor will tell you how much weight you can put on your operated leg when using your walking aids. There are four types of weight limit:

1. **Non-weight Bearing** – No weight is allowed on the operated leg and it must be kept off the floor.
2. **Feather Weight Bearing** – The toe of the operated leg can be touched to the floor *for balance only* but not to hold any weight.
3. **Partial Weight Bearing** – Up to half the patient's weight can be put on the operated leg.
4. **Weight Bearing as Tolerated** – Most or all of the patient's weight can be put on the operated leg.

Fitting and Using Your Walker

Getting the Right Fit

- Put on the shoes you will be wearing when you use your walker.
- Stand up straight.
- Put your walker in front of and partially around you.
- Let your arms hang by your sides with your elbows bent slightly. The hand grips on your walker should be at wrist level. Adjust the height of the walker if the hand grips are not at wrist level.
- With the height adjusted, put both hands on the walker's hand grips (see picture).

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3 Simple Steps to Walking with Your Walker

Standing straight with the walker in front of and partially around you, follow these 3 easy steps:

1. Move the walker one step length ahead of you. Put all four legs of the walker on the floor. (Do this the same way if your walker has two wheels.)
2. Move your operated leg forward and push down on the walker using your arms.
3. Move your good leg forward so that it is even with or slightly ahead of your operated leg.

Repeat these steps – 1) walker, 2) operated leg, 3) good leg – to continue walking.

Remember – put only as much weight on your operated leg as you can tolerate or as allowed by your doctor.

Getting Up on and Down from a Single Step or a Curb with your Walker

Always use your walker to get up on or down from a single step or a curb. Here is how to do this safely:

1. Walk as close as you can to the curb or step.
2. Once you feel steady, lift the walker onto the step.
3. Step up, putting your good leg up first.
4. Raise your operated leg onto the step.
5. To step down, place the walker down to the bottom edge of the step. Put your operated leg down first and then step down with your good leg.

Remember – never use your walker to go up or down more than a single step, and put only as much weight on your operated leg as you can tolerate or as allowed by your doctor.

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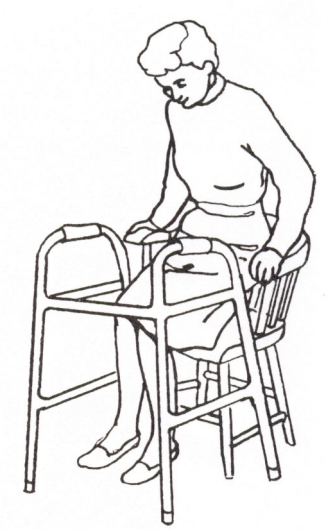
Sitting Down and Standing Up with Your Walker



1. Find a steady chair with solid armrests or sides. Stand with your back to the chair and with the walker close to you.
2. Place the back of your good leg against the chair.
3. Slide your operated leg forward slightly.
4. Place both hands on the armrests or sides of the chair.
5. Lower yourself gently onto the chair.
6. Slide back in the chair until you are comfortable.

Do the reverse to stand up.

Remember – never use an unstable chair or one that is very low and be careful not to put more weight on your operated leg than you can tolerate or than allowed by your doctor.

Safety Tips

√ Always wear shoes with good support. Do not wear slippers.

√ Check the condition of the rubber tips on the walker. Replace them if they are worn or in poor condition.

√ Do not place the walker too far ahead when walking. A good rule is to place the walker no more than one step length in front of you.

√ Do not step too far into the walker when walking. Stepping too far into the walker may cause you to lose your balance.

√ Do not lean on the walker when getting up or sitting down. Leaning on the walker could cause it to tip over.

√ Avoid wet surfaces – they can be slippery. Take small steps if you must walk on a wet or slippery surface.

√ Remove loose mats and rugs, electric cords and cables. They could cause you to trip or slip.

√ Never use your walker on stairs.

Note: Use your walker until your doctor or physical therapist tells you it is no longer needed.

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Fitting and Using Your Cane

Getting the Right Fit

- Put on the shoes you will be wearing when you use your cane.
- Stand up straight and relax your shoulders.
- Hold the cane in the hand **opposite** your operated leg – in the right hand if the surgery was on your left side; in the left hand if the surgery was on your right side.
- Place the cane about 10 cm (4 in.) from the side of your good leg. Stand so that your weight is spread evenly between your feet and your cane. Do not put more weight on your operated leg than you can tolerate or than allowed by your doctor.
- Let the hand you are using to hold the cane drop down by your side with your elbow bent slightly. The hand grip on the cane should be at wrist level. If the hand grip is not at wrist level, adjust the cane's height by:
    - ⇒ Pushing in the button and sliding the tubing in or out if you are using an adjustable cane.
    - ⇒ Cutting the cane to the proper length if it is wooden.

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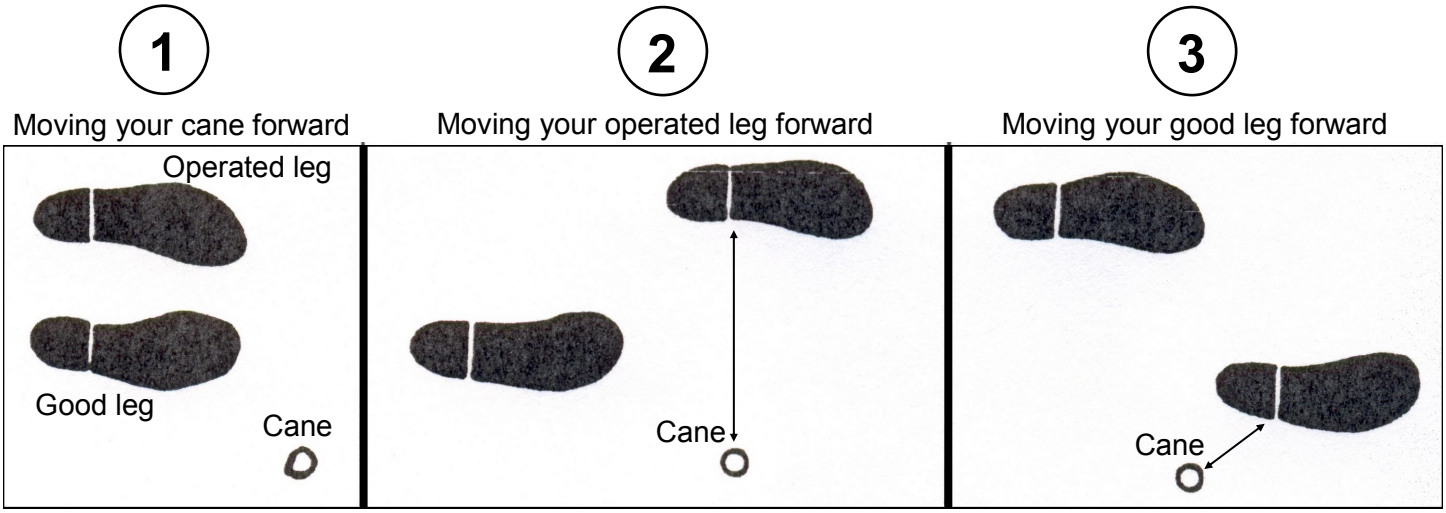
3 Simple Steps to Walking with Your Cane

Standing straight with the cane about 10 cm (4 in.) from the side of your good leg, follow these three steps:

1. With your cane in the hand opposite your operated leg, shift your weight to the good leg and move the cane 10 cm in front of your foot.
2. Move your operated leg forward so the foot is even with the cane.
3. Shift your weight to your operated leg and the cane. Move the good leg forward so the foot is ahead of the cane.

Repeat these steps – 1) cane forward, 2) operated leg forward and in line with cane, 3) good leg forward ahead of cane – to continue walking.

Remember – keep your back straight and your stomach muscles tight when taking each step and put only as much weight on your operated leg as you can tolerate or as allowed by your doctor.



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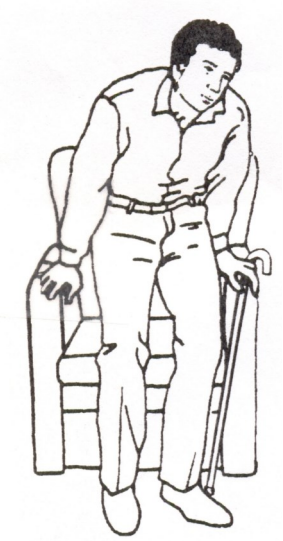
Sitting Down with Your Cane



1. Find a steady chair with solid armrests or sides. Using your cane, stand with the back of your legs lightly touching the chair.
2. Move the cane out from your side – lean it on the chair and reach back with both hands to grab onto the armrests or the seat of the chair.
3. Slide your operated leg forward.
4. Lower yourself gently onto the chair.
5. Move back in the chair until you are comfortable.

Never sit in an unstable chair or one that is very low.

Standing Up with Your Cane

1. To get out of the chair, place your cane on the end of the armrest or in your hand.
2. Move closer to the edge of the chair seat and move your heels close to the base of the chair.
3. Push down on the armrests or seat of the chair and lean forward slightly.
4. Put the foot on your operated side forward slightly and push yourself up with your good leg and arms.
5. Steady yourself. Move the cane's tip to about 10 cm (4 in.) from the side of your good leg.

Remember – be careful when sitting down and standing up not to put more weight on your operated leg than you can tolerate or than allowed by your doctor.

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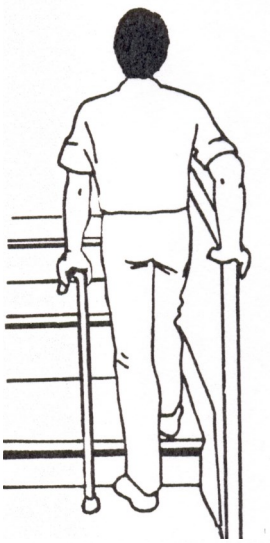
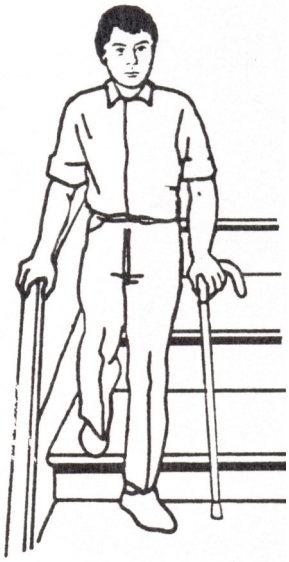
Going Up and Down Stairs with Your Cane



To Go Up the Stairs

1. Stand close to the bottom step.
2. If there is a handrail, hold onto it after checking that it is solid and safe. Hold the cane in your other hand.
3. Lift your good leg to the first step. Make sure to balance your weight between the cane and the handrail.
4. Lift your cane and operated leg to the first step using the handrail to help lift your weight. You should now be standing on the first step with both legs and your cane.

Go up one step at a time this way.



To Go Down the Stairs

1. Making sure you feel secure and steady, stand close to the edge of the first step. If there is a handrail, hold onto it and hold the cane in your other hand.
2. Lower your cane and operated leg onto the first step.
3. Lower your good leg onto the same step.

Go down one step at a time this way making sure you are steady on your feet for each step.

Remember – do not put more weight on your operated leg than you can tolerate or than allowed by your doctor.

Safety Tips

√ Always wear non-skid shoes with good support. Do not wear open-heeled sandals, clogs or slippers.

√ Make sure the cane tip is wearing evenly and is not cracked or torn.

√ Avoid wet surfaces – they can be slippery. Take small steps if you must walk on a wet or slippery surface.

√ Attach an ice pick to the end of your cane if you are using it in winter.

√ Remove loose mats and rugs, electric cords and cables. They could cause you to trip or slip.

Note: Use your cane until your doctor or physical therapist tells you it is no longer needed.

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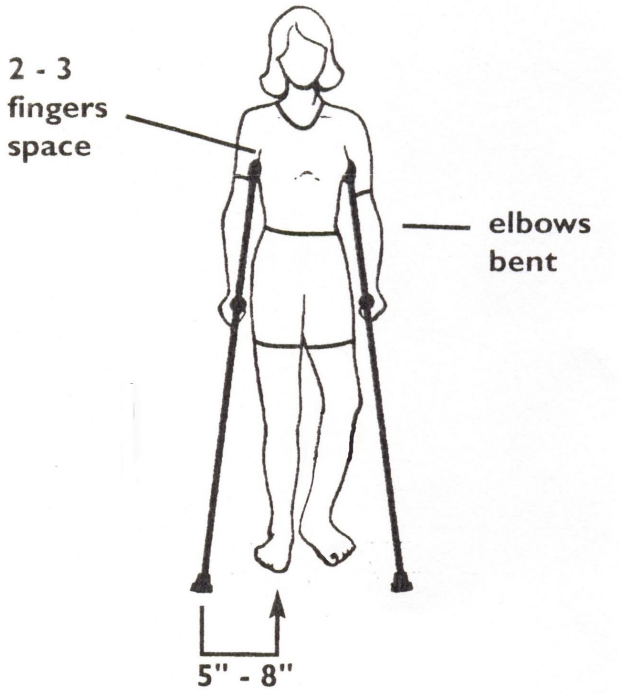
Fitting and Using Your Crutches

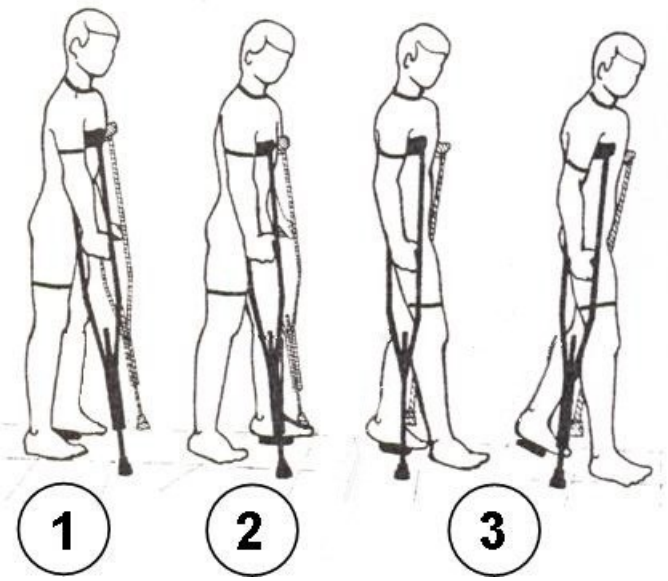
Getting the Right Fit

- Stand up straight placing the crutches under your armpits and the ends 13 cm to 20 cm (5 in. to 8 in.) from the side of each foot.
- The crutches are the right length for you if there is space of about 2 to 3 finger widths between the crutch pad at the top and your armpit.
- The hand grips should be at wrist level when your arms are hanging by your sides. Your elbows should be bent slightly when you grab and push down on the hand grips.
- Adjust the length of the crutches and position of the hand grips if necessary.



3 Simple Steps to Walking with Your Crutches

Stand straight and place the crutches ahead and to the sides of your feet for balance. Squeeze the crutches into your ribs by putting your weight on your hands while holding the hand grips and keeping your elbows straight. Follow these 3 steps:



1. Move both crutches forward at the same time.
2. Move your operated leg forward between the crutches.
3. Move your good leg ahead of the crutches.

Repeat these steps – 1) crutches, 2) operated leg, 3) good leg – to continue walking.

Remember – do not lean on the crutch tops and put only as much weight on your operated leg as you can tolerate or as allowed by your doctor.

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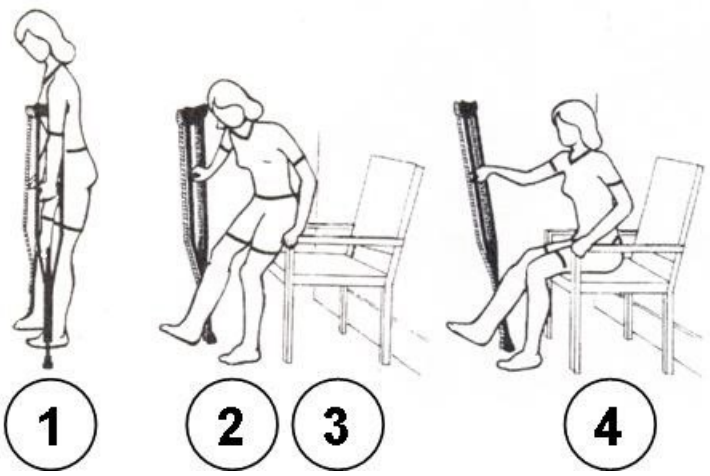
Sitting Down with Your Crutches

Find a steady chair with solid armrests or sides.



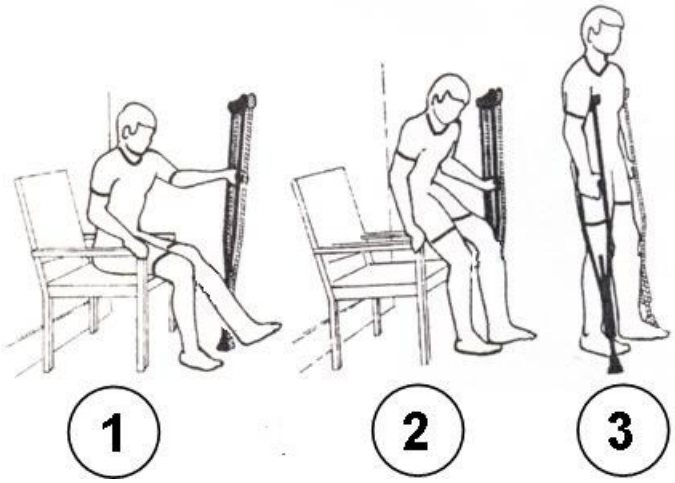
1. Standing with your crutches and with your back to the chair, step back until your good leg touches the front of the chair.
2. Keeping your weight on your good leg, remove the crutches from your arms. Hold both crutches in one hand grabbing them by the hand grips.
3. Lean forward and bend your good leg. Hold the armrest or chair seat with the other hand. Slide your operated leg forward.
4. Sit down slowly. Keep your crutches next to the chair.

Never sit in an unstable chair or one that is very low.

Standing Up with Your Crutches

Make sure the chair is steady before you try to stand.

1. Move forward to the edge of the chair so your good foot is flat on the floor.
2. Hold both crutches in one hand grabbing them by the hand grips. Hold the armrest or seat with the other hand.



3. Stand up taking your weight on your good leg. Put the crutches under your arms once you are steady on your feet.

Remember – be careful when sitting down and getting up not to put more weight on your operated leg than you can tolerate or than allowed by your doctor.

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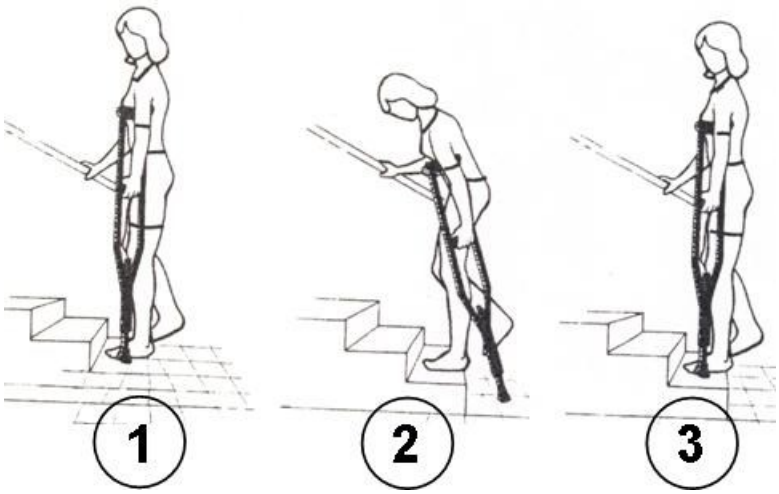
Going Up and Down Stairs with Your Crutches

A handrail makes going up and down stairs with crutches much safer. Use a handrail only after first checking that it is solid and safe. Have a handrail installed, if possible, on any stairway you must use in your home that does not have one.

To Go Up the Stairs

Stand close to the bottom step and close to the handrail.

Put both crutches under the arm opposite the handrail so that you are using them together as one (see picture). Hold onto the handrail with your free hand.



1. Raise your **good** leg and put your foot on the first step.
2. Lean forward taking your weight on your good leg.
3. Lift your operated leg and the crutches to the first step.

Go up the stairs this way **only one step at a time** making sure you are secure and steady before taking each step. If someone is helping you, have your helper stand behind and to your side.

To Go Up the Stairs *without a Handrail*

If you must go up a stairway that does not have a handrail:

1. Stand close to the bottom step with one crutch under each arm.
2. Raise your good leg placing your foot solidly on the first step.
3. Lean forward taking your weight on your good leg.
4. Lift your operated leg and the crutches to the first step.

Go up the stairs this way **only one step at a time** making sure you are secure and steady before taking each step. If someone is helping you, have your helper stand behind and to your side.

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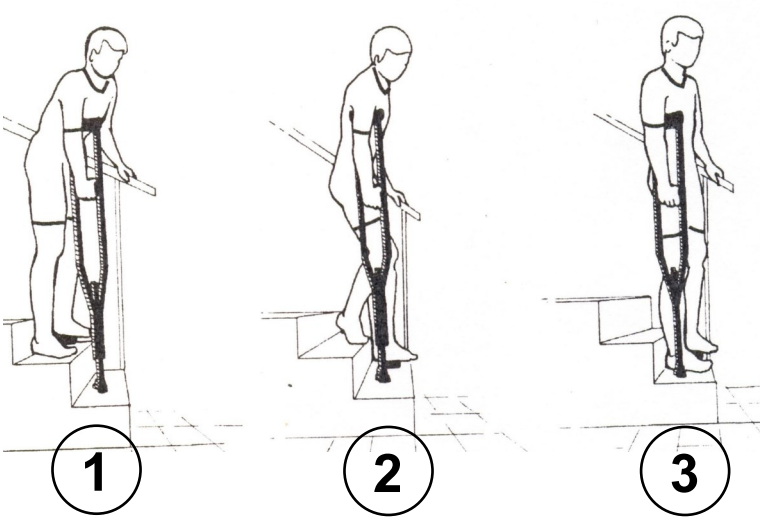
To Go Down the Stairs

Making sure you are steady, stand close to the edge of the top step and close to the handrail.

Put both crutches under the arm opposite the handrail so that you are using them together as one (see picture). Hold onto the handrail with your free hand.



1. Move your hand down the handrail and lower your crutches to the first step.
2. Lower your **operated** leg placing your foot on the first step.
3. Step down with your good leg.

Go down the stairs this way **only one step at a time** making sure you feel secure and steady before taking each step. If someone is helping you, have your helper stand in front and to your side.

To Go Down the Stairs *without a Handrail*

If you must go down a stairway that does not have a handrail:

1. Making sure you feel steady, stand close to the edge of the top step with one crutch under each arm.
2. Put both crutches on the first step below but keep the upper end of the crutches tilted back toward your arms.
3. Lean forward and crouch slightly until the tops of the crutches are against your armpits.
4. Lower your **operated** leg placing your foot down solidly on the step first.
5. Lower your good leg to the same step.

Go down the stairs this way **only one step at a time** making sure you are secure and steady before taking each step. If someone is helping you, have your helper stand in front and to your side.

Using a Single Crutch or a Cane

You may have to use just one crutch or a cane during recovery from hip or knee replacement. Always use a single crutch or cane in the hand **opposite** your operated leg. This gives you better support and helps you walk more normally.

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Using a 4-Point Gait with Crutches

The 4-point gait is a very stable way of walking with crutches. There are four points of contact with the floor – each crutch and each foot – to support the patient's weight. It can be used only by patients who can put some weight on their operated leg – either *partial weight bearing* or *weight bearing as tolerated* (see page 2).

Use the 4-point gait only if allowed by your physical therapist. If you are going to use this way of walking with crutches, your physical therapist will give you instructions in partial weight bearing or weight bearing as tolerated.

To walk using the 4-point gait:

1. Move one crutch forward.
2. Move the opposite foot forward so it is even with the crutch.
3. Move the other crutch forward.
4. Move the opposite foot forward so it is even with the crutch.

Repeat these steps – 1) crutch, 2) opposite foot, 3) other crutch, 4) opposite foot – to continue walking.

Safety Tips

√ Make sure your crutches have rubber tips, padded tops and secure hand grips. Keep them in good condition. Replace them when they are worn or damaged.

√ Numbness or tingling below your armpits or in your upper arms is a sign you are not using your crutches the right way.

√ Always wear shoes with good support or leave your feet bare. Do not wear slippers.

√ Use a waist pouch instead of a purse.

√ Avoid wet surfaces – they can be slippery. Take small steps if you must walk on a wet or slippery surface.

√ Remove loose mats and rugs, electric cords and cables. They could cause you to trip or slip.

Note: Use your crutches until your doctor or physical therapist tells you they are no longer needed.

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Walking Aids for HIP AND KNEE REPLACEMENT PATIENTS belongs to:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Address: _____

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