



## Choosing a walking frame

Walking frames come in different shapes and sizes and meet a range of needs. It is important to know what you are looking for before you make your purchase.

### Why use a walking frame

People are often reluctant to consider using a walking frame and may wait until they are told to use one by a health professional (and then often rebel against the advice!) or until they feel so unsafe walking that they have no choice. The right walking frame should not only keep you safe but should actually open up your world, allowing to walk further, for longer, and keep doing the things you love. Don't wait until you're desperate; think of a frame as just another tool to help you enjoy life.

Some people choose to use a frame to allow them to get out beyond their garden gate and others find they need one just to get around the house. If you are not able to walk safely within your own home you may meet the criteria to be provided with a walking frame by the Ministry of Health (via Enable).

**On the Go Physio** can give you further advice and assess you for this or you can ask your GP to refer you to a physiotherapist at the local DHB (there may be a wait time before you can be seen). If you are buying a frame yourself they can be expensive so it's important you get the right frame for you. You may like to print off this guide and take it shopping with you!

### Things to consider when choosing a walking frame

#### What purpose will it fulfil?

Think about why you need a walking frame and where you are likely to use it. If it will be indoors and you have a small house you will need a small frame that turns easily. If you are using it to go for long walks outside on rough terrain you will need a sturdy frame with large wheels and possibly a seat.

#### How many wheels?

Most frames are four wheeled and this is a safe stable option. For very small houses you may be encouraged to consider a three wheel frame **but** these are less stable and may not be safe if you have trouble with your balance. It is possible to get some very small, stable four wheel options for small environments.

#### Does it need brakes?

If you will only use your frame indoors or out on very flat surfaces you may not need brakes. Brakes are useful if you will ever go up or down a slope or steps or if you sometimes find yourself walking too quickly and need to slow down (for example some people with Parkinson's disease). If you have a walking frame with brakes make sure you are easily able to put the brakes on **and** take them off again.

#### Do I need a seat?

A seat can be very useful if you get tired or breathless when out walking. It can allow you to go further, more confidently, as you are able to stop and rest. On the negative side a seat does mean a bigger, bulkier

frame which is further away from you and can cause you to lean forward a little. Bear in mind that the seats on walking frames are not designed to be sat in for a long period and you should not sit on your frame and have somebody push you!

### **Wheels or no wheels?**

Most walking frames have wheels but it is possible to get some which have four stoppers instead. These are fantastic for people who walk slowly and have poor balance or difficulty taking weight on their legs. They are very safe as they can't 'run away' but they do limit walking speed as you need to lift them forward at each step.

### **Will I need a folding frame?**

Most walking frames are able to be folded but can fold in different ways. If you will need to take your frame out in a car or taxi you should check that it folds neatly and is not too heavy to lift into a car boot.

### **Do I need a basket and tray?**

Baskets or bags can be incredibly useful if you are going out to the shops but do add extra weight and bulk to your frame. Look for a basket or bag that can be easily taken off when you don't need it. If you will be using a frame indoors then a basket and tray combination is fantastic to ensure you always have your phone nearby, tissues, your book, knitting or anything else you need! They can become a portable coffee table but be careful not to overload them.

### **Extra options**

Most mobility shops hold the basic models. If you do not think a basic model will meet your needs you can get all sorts of accessories such as armrests, single arm steering options, holders for oxygen bottles, comfortable handles for arthritic hands...there are numerous options. Have a good talk to the supplier about all your needs or have a thorough assessment with a Physiotherapist if you are needing anything extra.

### **Measuring up a frame**

It is important your frame is the right height for you. If it is too low you will start leaning forward and if it is too high it won't provide the proper support. When you push your frame your elbows should be slightly bent and your shoulders should not be hunched up.

### **Correct use of a walking frame**

Each frame works differently and there are different techniques for taking frames up and down steps which depend on the frame and on the person using it.

If you need assistance choosing the correct walking aid for you, getting the height right or learning the correct way to use it, **On the Go Physio** can visit you in your own home to make sure you are getting things right from the start. Using the wrong aid, or using it in the wrong way can increase your risk of falls or cause you issues in other joints over time.



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