



## Choosing a walking stick or crutch

A walking stick is a simple tool that can make a big difference to a person's safety and ability to walk. There are a few important points when choosing and using a walking stick or crutch.

### Why use a walking stick

#### Using a walking stick to help with balance

If you feel unsteady in certain conditions having a walking stick that you use from time to time can be a great investment. Simply having something to touch on the ground can make a big difference if your balance isn't perfect. Often people use walking sticks only when they are tired, when they are walking on uneven footpaths or when they are in a busy shopping mall. Using a walking stick will signal to other people to give you a bit of extra space. If you are only using a stick on occasion you may find using one that folds up is handy. It can be kept in your handbag (or your wife's handbag!) or the car. If you need a walking stick all the time to keep you steady it is important that you are assessed by a physiotherapist to determine the right option for you. Poor balance can often be improved with balance and strength exercises and your physiotherapist can advise you on this. You should also inform your GP if you feel unbalanced as they may need to investigate other causes such as blood pressure issues, medical conditions or your medications.

#### Using a walking stick or crutch to take the weight off a weak or injured leg

If you have a leg that is weak, painful or injured you may need a walking stick or a crutch to help support your weight. An elbow crutch offers more support than a walking stick but can be more complicated as you have to thread your arm through whilst standing up. It is important you use a stick that is the right height and that you use it in the correct way.

#### Measuring the height

To get the right height for your walking stick or crutch stand with your arms by your side. The hand grip should sit at the level of your wrist. This is just a rough guide and you may find it more comfortable up or down one notch. A physiotherapist can check this for you if it does not feel right or if you would like help with this.

#### Correct use

If you are using a walking stick or elbow crutch to take the weight off one leg it is important you hold it in the hand **opposite** the affected leg. This sometimes feels odd to start and if you have used it in the other hand for a long time it can seem wrong. However it is important to do this to keep the body balanced and prevent getting pain in other joints over the long term. Remember when you walk normally the arms and legs swing at opposite times! If you are using two walking aids you still want to move the stick at the same time as the opposite leg.

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.