Walking aids: Walking Frames and Sticks

Recommended Practice

The height of frame handles or sticks should equal the distance between the person’s wrist crease (arm hanging relaxed) and the floor (measured when the person is wearing walking shoes). Elbows should generally be at 15-30 degrees flexion when walking. If the person is new to a mobilization aid, or they are assessed as lacking the appropriate skills to use their aid effectively, they must be reviewed promptly by a physiotherapist.

FRAMES

• Position the frame a short distance in front of the person with hand brakes engaged
• Both hands should be positioned at the front edge of the mattress or chair arms, the person should push themselves forward and up into standing, and then place both hands on the frame
• To sit down, the person should lean forwards, locate the mattress edge or chair arm with one hand, transfer the second hand to the chair/bed, and then lower slowly

PICK-UP FRAME

• Lift the frame forward
• Ensure that all four leg tips touch the floor at the same time
• Leaning on the frame, step forward with the affected leg, but never more than half-way into the frame
• Then step forward with the unaffected leg
• Pick-up frames are generally only suitable after lower limb injury or when a person requires considerable support, and are for use only over short distances

WHEELED FRAME

• Push the walker forward and only lean as much weight through the frame as is required to walk comfortably with even steps
• Check that the frame height and type are correct for the user
  • Upright posture when walking, with the user able to control the forward movement of the frame
  • Elbows at approximately 15-30 degrees flexion, with shoulders relaxed
  • Feet should step less than half-way into the frame
• If the person is leaning forwards and the frame is too far in front, either the frame height is set too high, or...
the frame is not providing sufficient support

• If the wheeled frame is not providing sufficient support, then trial a frame that provides increased support. The progression in terms of providing increasing support is as follows: trial a 3- or 4-wheeled frame with handbrakes initially. If further support is required, trial a 4-wheeled frame with push-down braking mechanism. If still further support is required trial a 2-wheeled frame

STICKS

• Ensure a rubber tip is fitted to the tip of the stick
• Sticks are held on the unaffected side
• There should be 15-30° flexion in the elbow when holding the cane, approximately 5 to 10 cm lateral and 15 cm anterior to the shoe measured when wearing walking shoes
• Move the stick forward and then, while taking some weight on the stick, lift the affected leg forward to the level of the stick. Progress to moving the stick and affected leg together
• Step forward with unaffected leg past affected leg, aiming for an even stride length with each step

Supporting Evidence Summaries

1. Physical Disabilities (Older Adults): Walking Aids

Archived Publications

1. JBI-RP-4326-1 (Published at 4 May 2021)

Occupational Health and Safety Considerations

Author(s) potential or perceived conflicts of interest are collected and managed in line with the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) standards.


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