

# Crutches for children

## Why use crutches

Crutches may help your child recover from leg injuries, such as a fracture, surgery, sprain or strain. Some injuries – usually fractures – may require the broken bone/s to be rested. Your child's doctor will advise when crutches are required or recommended.

## When to use crutches

Crutch walking is difficult. Generally children need to be at least seven years old to safely use crutches. Your child will be assessed to ensure crutches are appropriate and can be safely used.

Some children will not manage crutches safely and a walking frame or wheelchair is a better option. If you feel that your child is not coordinated enough to use crutches, or if you have any doubts, please let your doctor know.

## Measuring crutches

The top of the crutch should be about two finger widths below the armpit. The handles should be positioned so that the elbows are almost straight when your child is standing.

To measure a child lying flat (see figure 1):

- Ensure their shoulders are relaxed
- Measure from two finger-widths below the armpit to the base of the heel (with child's toes pointing to the ceiling)
- For the handle height, measure from the wrist crease to the base of the heel with the elbow almost straight
- Check again when your child stands up that the crutches are the correct height, and adjust if necessary

The amount of weight your child can put on an affected leg depends on the injury. Be guided by your health care professional.

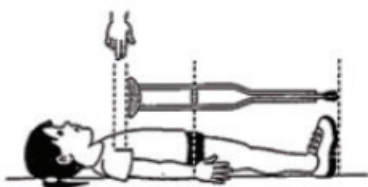


Figure 1



Figure 2

## Crutch walking

- Move crutches forward – not too wide, not too narrow
- Lean forward to bring weight over crutches then, pushing through arms, hop through with unaffected foot

## Standing

- Hold both crutches firmly in one hand, with the other hand on seat or armrest (figure 2)
- Keep non-affected foot flat on floor
- Slide bottom forward to edge of seat
- Lean forward, then stand (figure 3)
- Place crutches under each arm (figure 4)
- Push through wrists, which keeping crutch pads firmly against chest wall
- Do not lean through armpits



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

## Walking up stairs

- Place crutches close to the step (figure 5)
- Pushing through arms, lean forward to bring weight over crutches, then hop on to first step with unaffected foot (figure 6)
- Straighten body while bringing crutches up on to first step (figure 7)
- Continue carefully up stairs
- If unsafe, child may sit on step and go up on their bottom (figure 8)



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8

### Walking down stairs

- Place crutches carefully down to step below
- Move affected foot out in front of crutches and lean slightly forward to bring weight through crutches (figure 9)
- Pushing firmly through arms, step down on to unaffected foot (figure 10)
- Continue slowly down stairs, repeating the sequence
- If unsafe, child may sit on step and go down on their bottom



Figure 9



Figure 10

### Safety tips

- Make sure your child puts any weight through their hands, not their armpits
- Make sure your child wears supportive, non-slip shoes, such as runners
- Do not let your child use crutches while wearing socks as they are too slippery
- Encourage your child to take their time, especially when using stairs
- Crutches should be kept close to your child's feet and not moved too far out to the side
- Your child should not pivot on their good foot, but rather hop around to change direction

### How long does my child need crutches for?

This depends on the injury and how quickly your child recovers. It is important to follow medical advice and to attend all follow-up appointments.

### Seeking help

**Cabrini Emergency Department (ED)** is staffed by experienced emergency doctors and nurses 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. If you have any questions about your ED treatment our qualified ED staff can be contacted on **(03) 9508 1500** at any time. If you need to return to Cabrini ED for ongoing care we would be glad to take care of you again and if this occurs within a week of your initial consultation the doctor's fee will be bulk-billed.

You can also expect to receive a phone call or SMS message from one of our emergency nurses the day after you have been discharged. The nurse will be able to clarify any aspect of your diagnosis, treatment, or follow-up.

In a medical emergency return to Cabrini ED if it is safe to do so or go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call an ambulance – dial triple zero (000).

### Want to know more?

- Contact Cabrini ED on **(03) 9508 1500**
- Ask your local doctor or healthcare professional
- Visit the Royal Children's Hospital website [www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo)
- Visit the Better Health Channel at [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)