

Using crutches

Why use crutches?

Crutches can help you recover from leg injuries such as a fracture, surgery, sprain (over-stretching of the ligaments) or strain (over-stretching of muscles and tendons). By reducing the amount of weight placed on an affected leg, injuries can heal quicker and allow you to stay mobile. Sometimes crutches may be given to you for other injuries such as low back pain, particularly if you have pain or weakness in your legs.

When to use crutches

Your healthcare professional will advise you when it is appropriate to use crutches and ensure your crutches are fitted and used correctly.

The amount of weight to put on an affected leg depends on your injury and will vary from no weight at all to your full body weight as tolerated. Be guided by your healthcare professional.

How long do I need crutches for?

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

How to use crutches

It is important that your crutches fit properly. There are two main types of crutches – underarm and forearm crutches.



Underarm (axilla) crutches

When standing with arms loosely by your side, each crutch should be two finger widths below the armpit.

The heel of your hand should rest on the hand grip while keeping your wrist and elbow bent slightly.



Forearm (elbow) crutches

When standing with arms loosely by your side, the hand grip should line up with the crease of your wrist.

When holding the hand grip, the elbow should be slightly bent. The top of each crutch should be about two finger widths below your elbow.

Safety tips

- Ensure there is enough padding at the top and on the handle of underarm crutches

- Ensure screws are fully tightened and rubber stoppers are not worn through
- Make sure your weight goes through your hands, not your armpits
- Wear supportive, non-slip shoes such as runners
- Do not walk in socks because they are too slippery
- Avoid wet or slippery surfaces
- Take your time, especially when using stairs

Crutches should be kept close to your feet. Do not allow the crutches to move too far out to the side.

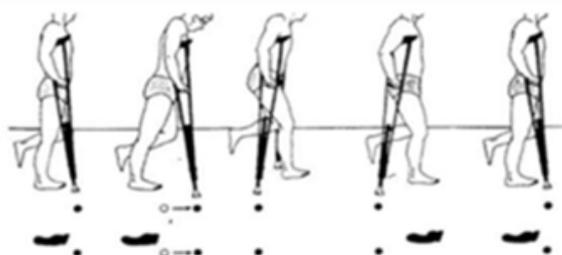
Underarm crutches are more stable than forearm crutches. This makes underarm crutches safer if you can only walk (weight bear) on one leg.

Walking pattern

1. Put your crutches out in front, push all your weight down through your hands, then hop through with the uninjured leg as far as you feel comfortable. Initially this may just be in line with the crutches. As you gain more confidence you can hop right through to in front of the crutches.
2. When you are able to put some weight through your injured leg, put your crutches out in front, step your injured leg first, push down through the crutches and then follow through with your uninjured leg.
3. Always keep a triangle between your uninjured leg and the crutches to ensure good balance.
4. Do not pivot or twist on your uninjured foot. Hop around or take small steps in a circle to change direction.

For a visual depiction of the ideal walking pattern, see Figure 1.

Figure 1: Walking pattern

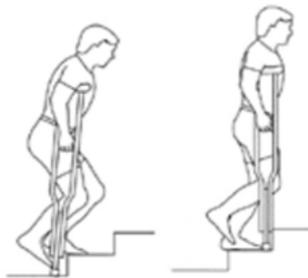


Going up stairs

When going up stairs leave your crutches on the lower step initially. Push through your hands and put your uninjured foot up first and then bring your injured leg and crutches up last (see Figure 2). Do not put weight on your injured leg if you are not allowed to.

When a railing is available hold both crutches in one hand or have someone hold the second crutch for you and have the other hand holding the railing. Lead with your uninjured leg and support your weight with both arms. Follow with your injured leg. Do not put weight on your injured leg if you are not allowed to.

Figure 2: Going up stairs



Going down stairs

When going down stairs put your crutches down the step first. Have your injured leg out in front of you and do not put weight on it if you are not allowed to. Make sure you are balanced, then take the weight down through your crutches and step down with your uninjured leg. Once you can take weight through your injured leg, put your crutches down, then the injured leg and then your uninjured leg (see Figure 3).

When a railing is available hold both crutches in one hand or have someone hold the second crutch for you and have your other hand holding the railing. Move the crutches and railing hand forward, leading with your injured leg. Do not put weight on your injured leg if you are not allowed to. Follow with your uninjured leg.

Figure 3: Going down stairs



Sitting down

- Get close enough so the back of your legs are touching the chair (or whatever else you are sitting on)
- Hold both crutches by the handles using the opposite side to your injured leg
- Reach back with your other arm and lower yourself into the chair

Standing up

- Hold both crutches by the handles using the opposite hand to your injured leg
- Push yourself up using the hand grips and the chair arms
- Once standing and balanced, arrange the crutches under each arm

Follow-up

It is important that you follow your doctor's instructions and attend all follow-up appointments. Depending on your reason for needing crutches, you may be referred to a sports physician and/or physiotherapist for follow-up exercises and rehabilitation.

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 Better Health Channel at www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au