



Care Partner Information

Tips for Providing Older Adult Care

Using a Walker

Many older adults need some support when walking. Different types of walkers work better for different needs. A doctor, physical therapist or other health care provider can help pick the best walker for the person's needs, and show them how to correctly use it. Using a walker in the right way can help older adults stay mobile and prevent falls. But if a walker is not used in the right way, it can cause problems.

Standard Walkers

A standard walker has four legs with rubber tips and no wheels. It can fold up, so it takes less space in a car or home. This type of walker is best for people who need to put a lot of weight on the walker. But some older adults do not like standard walkers because they have to pick it up to move it with every step.



Walkers With Two Wheels

Some walkers have two wheels on the front, and two legs on the back that can slide. These walkers also can fold up when they are not in use. People walk more naturally with walkers that have two front wheels, compared to walkers with no wheels. This is because they do not have to stop and pick it up with each step. But the fixed front wheels make it hard to turn.

Walkers with Three Wheels

Some walkers have three wheels. These walkers help with balance almost as much as walkers with four wheels. They are lighter than walkers with four wheels, and are easier to turn and move in small spaces.



Walkers With a Seat and Four Wheels

Walkers with a seat are good for people who easily get tired when they walk and need to rest. The four wheels rotate, so it is easy to turn. But, both three-wheel and four-wheel walkers can be harder to use because they have hand brakes. They are not stable for people who need to put weight on the walker. They also are not good for people with dementia, who may forget to brake.

This Care Partner Information page is part of a series on older adult caregiving tips. They are written to help family and community caregivers, direct care workers and community health representatives care for older adults. Available in English and Spanish at www.aging.arizona.edu

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It is important to make sure the walker is the right fit. If it is too short or too tall it can increase the chances of a fall.

How to Fit a Walker

Stand between the two hand rails with arms hanging straight. The hand grips should be level with the creases on the inside of the wrist. The elbows should bend a little when the hands are on the grips. For walkers with a seat, make sure the hand rails are wider than the person's hips when they are seated.



How to Walk with a Walker

Place walker in front with the open side facing the person. Stand up straight with the elbows next to the body and hands on the grips. Step forward with the weaker leg. Keep the body inside the walker and push straight down on the hand grips. Next, bring the stronger leg forward. Move the walker forward and step into it one leg at a time. Take small steps to turn.

If the person needs the walker for support, start by pushing the walker about one step ahead and leaning a little forward. Be careful not to walk behind the walker and push it like a cart. When using a walker with four wheels, always lock the wheels before sitting. Do not try to move the walker when seated.

How to Go Up and Down Curbs

Going up and down curbs with a standard or two-wheeled walker takes a lot of practice. Walkers with seats are heavy, so never use them on curbs. It is best to always try to use a ramp or elevator when possible. Also, never use any walker on an escalator.

To go up curbs:

1. Stand close to the curb.
2. Place the walker on top. Make sure all four legs of the walker are flat on the curb.
3. Step up with the stronger leg first, then bring the other foot up on the curb.

To go down curbs:

1. Stand with toes behind the edge of the curb.
2. Place the walker down. Make sure all four legs are flat on the ground.
3. Step down with the weaker leg first. Use the stronger leg to lower down and bring the other foot to the same level.

A good rule to remember when going up or down curbs is “Up with the good (leg), down with the bad (leg).”

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