



# Choosing walking equipment

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DLF Factsheet

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# INTRODUCTION

The aim of this factsheet is to provide 'first stop' information on the types of equipment available for positioning, standing and walking and details about the useful features of some of the more standard pieces of equipment.

For up-to-date product and supplier information, please contact our equipment helpline, open Monday to Friday from 10am to 4pm, Tel: 0845 130 9177 (calls charged at local rate), or if you use a textphone: 020 7432 8009.

Alternatively, you can write to our letter enquiry service or contact us via e mail at [advice@dlf.org.uk](mailto:advice@dlf.org.uk) . To help us give you a concise and informative reply, please provide us with as much detail as possible including information on the difficulties you are having and any solutions you have considered, including equipment ideas.

## SUPPLY AND PROVISION

### WALKING EQUIPMENT

#### Health provision

Walking equipment is generally regarded as a mobility device, and is therefore provided by a physiotherapist based at a local hospital or health centre.

Referral to a physiotherapist can be made by a range of professionals including therapists, nurses, and doctors.

Provision may include:

- walking/pulpit frames;
- mobile frames/rollators;
- crutches;
- walking sticks;
- tripods/quadrupods.

## PURCHASE OF EQUIPMENT

### Private purchase

As a general rule, you should not consider buying mobility equipment privately without first consulting your GP or physiotherapist. Some suppliers are reluctant to provide a walking device to private individuals without a letter verifying the suitability from a physiotherapist or medical practitioner.

If you are becoming increasingly unsteady on your feet, it is important to investigate why this is happening. There may be treatment available to help you, for example instruction in muscle strengthening exercises by a physiotherapist.

On occasion, equipment with a different primary function, such as household trolleys and shopping trolleys, can be used to provide assistance when walking.

Household trolleys that are stable enough

to provide walking support may be available through local authority social services departments.

## Selecting the appropriate equipment

Before buying, try to see and try out the equipment. The Disabled Living Centres around the country have a wide range of equipment on display. All can give advice and information on walking equipment. For details of your nearest centre, contact the Disabled Living Centres Council (see useful addresses).

## PURPOSE OF WALKING EQUIPMENT

Walking equipment is used for two purposes: as part of a rehabilitation programme when the user is recovering from an injury or operation; and as a long-term aid to mobility when the user has a permanent difficulty with walking.

The rehabilitation process is a gradual progression towards independent and unassisted walking and may commence with the use of a walking frame to give the user confidence.

However, walking frames are often not practical for long-term use because they are difficult to manoeuvre in tight spaces and cannot be used on a flight of stairs. Crutches give a higher level of mobility - they allow for a quicker gait and can be used safely on stairs if the correct technique is used. As users increase in

confidence and are allowed to put more weight through their affected leg, they will progress onto one or two sticks. The ultimate aim of a rehabilitation programme is for the user to be walking independently, without walking equipment. Sometimes, complete recovery is not possible or users have an illness or disability that permanently affects their legs, their balance or their coordination. In these situations, mobility equipment may be required for long-term use, and to ensure that the appropriate device is selected, the user's lifestyle and home environment should be reviewed, as well as assessing his/her personal physical abilities.

Walking equipment may perform one or more functions including:

- provision of greater stability and balance by providing a wider support base;
- facilitating the walking pattern of the user in terms of speed and evenness of stride. The equipment may also help maintain an upright body posture;
- increasing the confidence of the user in his/her walking ability;
- weight redistribution - some of the weight carried through the legs when walking is transferred through the arms of the frame or stick as it is leant on for support. This may help reduce pain in the joints, muscles and ligaments in the lower limbs.

## **SAFE USE OF WALKING EQUIPMENT**

Walking equipment should improve mobility but, if an inappropriate walking device is used, if incorrect techniques are adopted, or if the device is not suitable for a particular environment, the independence and safety of the user will be jeopardised.

Advice about equipment and the way it should be used is available from the sources mentioned in the previous section. Other factors that should be looked at to minimise the risk of falling whilst using a walking device include:

### **Home environment**

Loose rugs, trailing flex, a cluttered floor area are all potential hazards.

### **Wet floors**

Walking equipment should not be used in wet floor areas.

### **Footwear**

Footwear should be appropriate and supportive.

### **Maintenance of the walking equipment**

All walking equipment should be checked regularly for signs of wear and tear. Particularly vulnerable parts include the

ferrules, which must be replaced if the slip-resistant rings or bobbles on their underside lose their definition, or if the rubber shows signs of cracking. Equipment that is height adjustable can show signs of stress at the height setting after prolonged use. Handgrips and underarm pads can also become worn.

Replacement ferrules are usually available from the issuing department, for example the hospital physiotherapy department or, if you feel that your walking device is structurally no longer safe to use, you must inform the issuing department which should provide you with a replacement. If you have bought your walking device privately, then you are responsible for maintenance and upkeep. Replacement parts are usually available from the commercial outlet from which you bought the equipment.

## **THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING WALKING EQUIPMENT**

Below are listed some aspects which need to be considered when choosing walking equipment.

### **HEIGHT**

#### **Walking frames**

It is very important to have the frame at the correct height for use.

- If the frame is too high, the person will find it difficult to straighten out his/her elbows sufficiently and will not take enough body weight through the arms.
- If the frame is too low, it will encourage the person to be bent over in a poor posture. However, a physiotherapist may deliberately set up a frame at a low height for people who tend to fall backwards - this will encourage them to lean forwards.
- Always be measured for the height of your walking frame wearing appropriate and supportive footwear.

To use the frame correctly, people should lift and move it slightly in front of them. They can then lean on the frame, taking their weight through the handgrips, and take two equal length steps into the centre of the frame.

To ensure that the arms are in the best position for weight bearing, the height of the handgrips should be at the level of the wrist bone when the user's elbows are very slightly bent (at an angle of about 15° flexion).

Some models are available in a number of fixed heights - the nearest suitable height should be chosen. Others have telescopic legs so that their height can be more finely adjusted using spring loaded catches.

## **Crutches**

Crutches must be at the correct height for use. Both axilla and elbow crutches usually have two adjustment points.

The overall height of axilla crutches can be adjusted. This should be measured by standing upright in appropriate and supportive footwear. The underarm pad should fit under the armpit with two finger widths of space above to ensure no pressure is applied through the armpit when the crutches are being used. The handgrip adjusts along the upright(s) of the crutches and should be set at a height level with the protruding bone at the side of the wrist.

The overall height of elbow crutches can be adjusted. This is measured by lining up the handgrips with the wrist bone. Some elbow crutches also have an adjustment for the elbow cuff, which should cradle the forearm just below the elbow joint so that movement of the elbow is not impeded.

## **Walking sticks**

It is very important to have the walking stick at the correct height for use. If the height is incorrect then the support will not be adequate. The most effective method of ensuring this is to have people standing in their regular footwear with their hands by their sides. The measurement to take is the distance between the wrist bone and the ground.

Some walking sticks are made of wood, which must be measured and cut with a saw to the correct height. In practice, when therapists are measuring wooden sticks, they turn the stick upside down and mark the point where the stick should be cut; keeping in mind the small addition to the overall height once a ferrule is attached.

Metal sticks are available in a variety of fixed heights - the nearest suitable height should be chosen - or they have a telescopic mechanism. This can be finely adjusted using spring loaded catches.

## **Tripods and quadrupods**

It is very important to have the tripod or quadrupod at the correct height for use. The most effective method of ensuring this is to have people standing in their regular footwear with their hands by their sides. The measurement to take is the distance between the wrist bone and the ground.

All tripods and quadrupods are made of metal, usually aluminium or steel, and have a telescopic mechanism for adjusting using spring loaded catches.

## **HANDGRIP STYLES**

### **Walking frames**

Most standard walking frames have either moulded plastic or foam rubber handgrips. However, someone with weak or painful hands or wrists will find it uncomfortable

to push down on these. Alternatives are available.

A few mobile frames are available with contoured, anatomically shaped handgrips which are designed to spread the weight over a wider area of the palm.

High walkers allow a person to bear weight through the forearms rather than through the hands. They have padded, vinyl covered, trough-shaped supports with vertical handgrips. The length and angle of the handgrips may be adjusted to achieve the most comfortable position. Alternatively, some walkers have a platform, rather than individual rests, on which to rest the forearms, and a vertical handgrip

Some frames have been adapted to have a central third handgrip for people who have the use of only one hand, for example someone who has had a stroke. This central handgrip enables the person to pick up the frame and move it forwards in the conventional way, although the weight distribution of the frame makes it a more cumbersome manoeuvre. This technique may also discourage a good walking posture, as the stronger, unaffected side of the body will be encouraged to lead the walking.



A few wheeled walking frames have a single bar-style pushing bar, which may have a single brake bar parallel to it. A person who has the use of only one hand may be able to use this style of frame, although it may be quite difficult to steer. Also, the user cannot step into this type of frame, so that it is more difficult to transfer body weight away from the legs and through the frame. This style of frame may, therefore, be more appropriate for someone who lacks confidence when walking outside, rather than someone who needs to relieve weight from a painful leg.

## Crutches

Some crutches can have contoured handles shaped to follow the contours of the hand, spreading the pressure over a wider area of the palm for more comfortable use. A gel handgrip can also help to improve comfort. Elbow crutches can be supplied with gutter armrests. These allow people to bear weight through their forearms rather than through their hands. They have padded, vinyl covered, trough-shaped supports with vertical handgrips. The length and angle

of some handgrips can be adjusted to achieve the most comfortable position.

## Walking sticks

A variety of different shaped handles are available including:

\* Crook handles



These may be less comfortable to hold than a right-angled handle, but can easily be hooked over the arm when not in use.

- Right angled handles

These are often more comfortable to use than a crook handle. The addition of a wrist strap may be useful to secure the stick when it is not in use.

Handles with swan necked shafts are offset above the stick, and spread the person's weight centrally over the base, which may be helpful for people who

require more stability.

\* Contoured handles



These are anatomically shaped handles, which spread the pressure over a wider area of the palm to improve comfort for permanent users or those with painful hands.

## BASE TYPE

The more points of contact a walking device has with the ground, the more stable it will be. Also the wider the base of support, the more stable the frame will be.

All walking equipment without wheels should be fitted with rubber ferrules to maximise grip.

## Frames with four legs

Those with legs that are spread widely apart will be the most stable but may be difficult to get through doorways. If the doorway is particularly narrow, the user may have to walk through sideways. Narrow four legged frames are available, but are not as stable.

## Frames with three legs

Those with three points of contact with the ground are compact and fold flat for storage, but are not as stable as four legged frames.

## Wheels/castors

A larger wheel or castor facilitates travel, especially over rough ground. Small solid wheels or castors are really only suitable for use indoors. Pneumatic wheels will require pumping up from time to time, but provide more suspension than solid rubber tyres. People with painful hands that may be aggravated by jarring may find this an advantage.

## Swivel vs fixed wheels or castors

- Large swivel castors are more manoeuvrable than fixed wheels.
- Fixed wheels are easier to push in a straight line.

## Number of wheels

### Two wheels

Frames with two wheels can be used in two ways:

- the frame is pushed with the rear ferrules lifted fractionally off the ground or they are allowed to glide across the floor surface, allowing the person to adopt a more fluent walking pattern;

- alternatively, it is used like a non-mobile pulpit frame, except that the frame does not have to be lifted up to move it forwards - the person pushes it instead. This frame is held stationary while the user steps forwards.

## Three wheels

Triangular frames have a single front swivel castor and two uni-directional rear wheels and are suitable for use outdoor. They are more manoeuvrable than four wheeled walkers, although not as stable. Like four wheeled frames, they enable the person to adopt a fluent walking pattern.



As with all mobility equipment, it is essential that triangular walkers are inspected regularly with particular attention paid to the locking mechanism (usually consisting of a cross brace), which maintains the rollator in an open position.

## Four wheels

Large wheels and/or large swivelling castors facilitate travel. However, they

may be too mobile for people who need to lean or push against the frame for Support - the frame may run away from them. When used appropriately, this style of frame will allow the person to adopt a more fluent walking pattern.

## BRAKES

It is very important to ensure that a fully mobile frame has brakes and that they can be operated quickly and easily by the user, so that he/she always feels in control. These are the most common types:

### Pressure brakes

These are operated by downward pressure on a spring-loaded frame. This causes the motion of the rear wheels to be interrupted when the user is leaning on the frame. However, they may not be suitable for users who cannot push down heavily enough on the frame or for heavy users who may apply the brakes permanently.

### Cable

These are similar to bicycle brakes and require a squeeze action to apply them. Simultaneous use of both hands is necessary. Care must be taken when using them as they provide an instant braking action. Cable brakes must be periodically checked and adjusted.

## **Locking**

These enable the user to lock the brakes in the on position so that the grip does not have to be continuously maintained. This safety feature is important when using a frame with a built-in seat.

## **MATERIAL**

### **Walking frames**

The majority of walking frames are made of aluminium with a chrome finish. Some are made of steel which may be better for heavy duty use. Rollators, particularly those for private purchase, have a coloured finish.

### **Walking sticks**

#### **Wooden**

These traditionally have a crook handle and, if supplied via the NHS, can be bought with a straighter Derby grip. Wooden sticks are cut to the correct height. They are available in various diameters and strengths which are designed to take different loads. They are not as adaptable for use by different people as metal sticks.

#### **Metal**

These tend to be stronger than wooden walking sticks. Some are fixed length, others are height adjustable. The ferrules of metal sticks must incorporate a metal disc to prevent the end of the stick cutting

into the rubber of the ferrule.

## **Crutches**

Most axilla crutches are made of wood although a few styles are made of metal, either aluminium or steel reinforced aluminium for heavy-duty use. Some metal crutches can have a coloured paint finish. All crutches must be fitted with an appropriate ferrule. The ferrules of metal crutches must incorporate a metal ring to prevent the base of the crutch cutting into the rubber of the ferrule.

## **WEIGHT**

### **Walking frames**

Heavy frames tend to be more stable, but may be difficult for some people to lift. Walking equipment designed for heavy duty use may be steel reinforced, adding to their weight.

## **MAINTENANCE**

Maintenance is essential to ensure the safety of the walking aid. Checks should be made for signs of wear and tear particularly at the site of screws and height adjustment mechanisms. All ferrules should be checked regularly and replaced as appropriate.

## **TYPES OF WALKING FRAMES**

### **NON-WHEELED FRAMES**

## Standard pulpit frames (zimmer frames)

Standard walking or pulpit frames are commonly known as zimmer frames and are mostly used indoors. They include the following features:

- metal frames made from aluminium or steel;
- rubber ferrules on the bottom of their four legs which aim to prevent the frame from slipping;
- moulded plastic or foam rubber handgrips. It is possible to get models with contoured handgrips, which enable the pressure exerted through the hands to be spread evenly over the palm.

The height of some models is fixed, on others it can be adjusted. Consider the size of the base if it is going to be used in a domestic setting, some may be too wide to go through small doorways. Alternatively, narrow frames are available but they may not offer sufficient stability.

Although walking frames are useful because they provide a large area of support, they do not allow the user to walk using a flowing walking pattern. The user has to keep stopping and starting as the frame is picked up, moved forwards and stepped into. They are therefore used as a rehabilitation aid but, where possible, other types of equipment are recommended for long-term use.

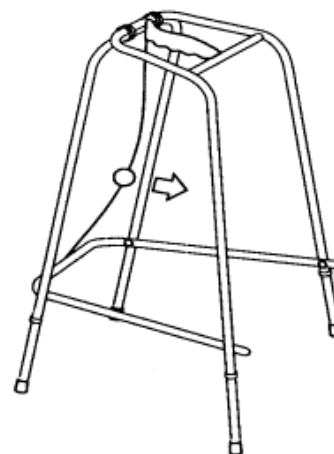
## Folding pulpit frames

A folding frame can easily be stored within the home if it does not need to be used all the time. It also makes it easier to transport in a car boot.

### \* Sides folding in

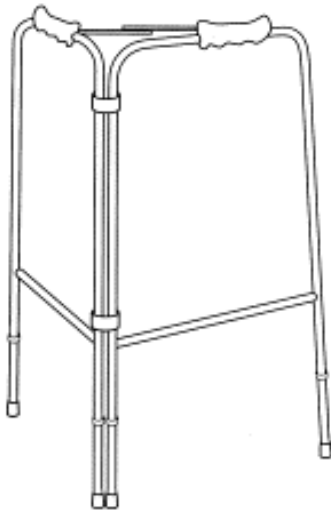
Some pulpit shaped frames have hinged sides, which can be folded flat against the front of the frame when the catches are released.

### Hinged front legs



These pulpit shaped frames have hinges between the front leg section and the rest of the frame. The frame is folded by pulling up a wooden ball on a drawstring attached to a movable bar on the front of the frame. This is an easy mechanism to operate but these frames are not as compact when folded as those with other folding mechanisms.

### \* Central hinging



All triangular frames hinge at the front so that, once a catch has been released, the two sides fold together to form a flat shape. The catch may be fiddly and should be inspected regularly for any sign of wear and tear.

### High or forearm walkers

Forearm troughs or gutters allow users to bear weight through their forearms rather than their hands. Adjustable troughs and handgrips enable them to achieve the most comfortable position.

### Reciprocal frames

These frames are hinged so that the sides can be alternately placed forwards with each step. They will go through tighter spaces than standard frames. The advice of a physiotherapist should be sought when considering this equipment.

## Body bracing frames

These form an external skeleton that supports a user with a flaccid paralysis. Footplates and bearings should be inspected at least once a week as it is essential to the stability of such appliances that the footplates are rigid. All other component parts should be inspected at regular intervals. The advice of a physiotherapist or, where appropriate, a registered orthotist should be sought when considering this equipment.

## WHEELED WALKING FRAMES

### Wheeled pulpit frames

These frames are basically the same as standard pulpit frames but instead of ferrules they have small wheels on the front legs. It may be possible to exchange the ferrules on a standard, non-moblie frame for wheeled extensions. The small wheels make them more suitable for indoor use but, as the wheels do not swivel, they can be difficult to manoeuvre.

Wheeled frames are useful for people who find it difficult to use a traditional frame as they make a more continuous walking pattern possible, and do not need to be lifted clear off the ground to move forwards.

### Rollators with two wheels

Two wheeled rollators have two wheels or

castors at the front and ferrules at the rear. They have a non-pulpit style frame with defined pushing handles. The height of the pushing handles can be adjusted. Fixed front wheels are more difficult to manoeuvre than castors. Accessories, including wire baskets, may be available.

### **Rollators with four wheels**

These frames have a four-point wheel base. The castors and/or wheels are not always fixed in one direction and therefore they have a greater degree of manoeuvrability. They are larger than traditional pulpit frames and are suitable for outdoor use. Handgrip styles vary between models, for example frames may have two pushing handles, a horizontal bar or may have contoured grips. The design of the handle and the position of the extras such as baskets and seats will determine whether the frame is pushed in front or stepped into. If the frame is stepped into it will offer the user more support.

### **Additional features**

Additional features, which may contribute to the user's independence, include:

#### **\* Seats**

These enable the person to take a rest if he/she becomes tired whilst walking. Some have a small backrest and armrests to help when sitting/standing.

Check on the size and the height of the

seat; some are very narrow, others are very low. It is advisable to have brakes, which will lock on, to ensure that the frame remains steady when standing up.

#### **\* Trays**

These can be fixed onto the frame and fold down or are removed when not required. They are especially useful for carrying items such as cups from room to room.

#### **\* Shopping baskets or bags**



The size and position of these will vary from model to model. Baskets that are positioned low down on the frame may be difficult to reach. However, carrying weight high up on the frame is more likely to disrupt the stability of the frame.

#### **\* Walking stick holders**

These enable the person to have his stick on hand to use when it is not convenient to use the frame, for example in a tight space.

### **Wheeled high and forearm walkers**

All have forearm troughs or gutters and handgrips which allow users to bear weight through their forearms rather than their hands. Adjustable troughs and handgrips enable users to achieve the most comfortable position.

### **Trainer walkers**

The style of walking equipment offers the user additional postural support for gait training and rehabilitation.

Advice should be sought from a therapist about the use of this equipment.

### **Mobile frames for one-handed use**

These frames have a central handgrip that enables the frame to be held in one hand. Care should be taken if using a one-handed frame as it does not offer as much support as gripping the frame with both hands. Advice should be sought from a physiotherapist or occupational therapist as using this sort of frame may have an adverse effect on some rehabilitation programmes.

### **Reverse mobile walkers**

These are wheeled walkers in which the user stands and faces outwards. The cross rails of the walker are therefore behind the user as he/she moves forwards.

## **TYPES OF CRUTCHES**

There are basically two styles of crutches: axilla (or underarm crutches) and elbow crutches. As a general rule, underarm crutches are used by people who must not weight bear through their bad leg and elbow crutches by those who can partially weight bear. Both styles of crutches are standard issue from your local hospital and tuition in their use should be available. Some simple guidelines for use are:

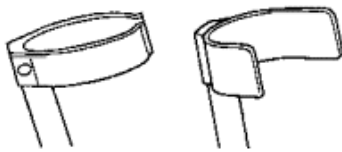
Crutches are designed to be used in pairs. Occasionally one crutch is used on its own but this should only be done under the guidance of a physiotherapist.

The affected leg stays with the crutches so you should move the bad leg forwards with the crutches then swing through with the good leg.

When going up steps or stairs remember to step up with the good leg first, following on with the bad leg and crutches; when going down stairs, the bad leg and crutches lead. Tuition may be required in the techniques used to ascend or descend stairs.

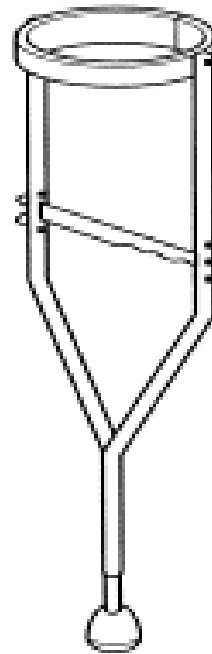
## ELBOW CRUTCHES

Both floor-to-handgrip height and the distance between the cuff and the handgrip are adjustable on double adjustable elbow crutches. Single adjustable elbow crutches allow floor to handgrip height adjustment only. Standard and anatomically moulded handgrips are available.



Elbow crutches are available with two styles of cuff: open or closed. An open cuff is semi-circular in shape and provides a support to brace the forearm against in the step-through phase of walking. A closed cuff is an incomplete ring which prevents the forearm slipping forwards out of place and holds the crutch on the arm if, for example, the user needs to take his/her hand off the crutch to open a door.

## CANADIAN CRUTCHES



These crutches are used as an alternative to axilla crutches, usually by permanent users. Instead of having an underarm pad, these crutches have a padded ring which encircles the upper arm, giving more security.

## AXILLA CRUTCHES

These have a single or double shaft. The height and the distance between the handgrip and the axilla pad are adjustable. If you are using axilla crutches do not lean on the underarm pad as this may interrupt the blood flow and put pressure on important nerves that run through the armpit. The pad should be squeezed between the upper arm and the chest wall.

The handgrips should be positioned so that the elbows are slightly flexed. This enables the person to brace the forearm,

wrist and elbow. By taking most of the weight through the hands and arms, users should be able to swing their body to bring the feet level with or beyond the front of the crutches.

## **FOREARM CRUTCHES WITH GUTTER ARMRESTS**

The height of these can be adjusted and they have trough or gutter armrests that support and spread the user's weight onto his/her forearms. The length and angle of the handgrip can be adjusted.

## **TYPES OF WALKING STICKS**

When using only one stick it should be held in the opposite hand to the affected leg so that a natural walking pattern and an upright posture can be maintained. The stick and the affected leg should be moved forwards together. If using more than one stick, professional advice should be sought for guidance on the most suitable pattern of use.

### **WOODEN WALKING STICKS**

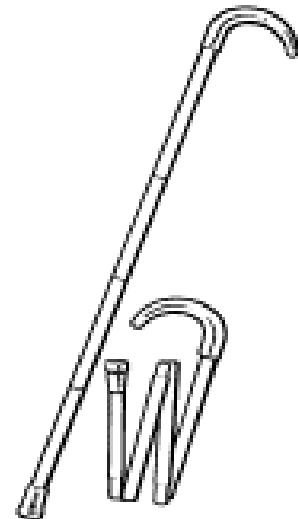
These usually have a crook or similar shaped handle so that they can be hooked over the forearm. Various diameters are available and they should be cut to the correct height.

### **METAL WALKING STICKS**

These tend to be stronger than wooden walking sticks. The height of some is fixed but the majority are height adjustable. Metal sticks are available with right angled handles, crook shaped handles and anatomically shaped handgrips.

### **FOLDING WALKING STICKS**

These are lightweight metal sticks with sectioned shafts that enable them to be folded up for storage, for example in a handbag.



Strong elastic runs inside the shaft to ensure that in its open position the stick remains stable. Fixed height or adjustable height versions are available. Some are provided with a plastic, storage wallet.

### **WALKING STICKS WITH A CONTOURED HANDGRIP**

These spread the weight of the user over

a wider area of the hand and may be more comfortable for permanent users or those with painful hands.

## **WALKING STICKS WITH A SWAN NECK**

A swan neck is offset so that the weight of the user is transferred centrally over the base of the stick. This may be helpful for those who require more stability.

## **WALKING STICKS WITH SEAT ATTACHED**

These are particularly useful for people who need to rest periodically, for example for those with breathing difficulties or a heart condition. However, they are not recommended for people who need to take a lot of weight through the stick as the addition of a seat alters the balance of the stick.

The weight of stick seats and the amount of strength needed to open and close the seat varies.



The height of many of these sticks cannot be adjusted and it is important to ensure that the overall height is appropriate for the individual user so he/she gains walking support from it.

The seat size is often small and seat height varies between the models; the lower the seat the more difficult it is to stand up from. Most do not provide back support or armrests to push up from.

Those with three or four legs provide a broader base of support and are therefore more stable to sit on than the shooting stick type, which have only one leg. Seat sticks with a single point base must have a rubber ferrule. Traditional style shooting sticks with a single point and plate base instead of a ferrule do not provide sufficient stability.

# WALKING STICKS FOR PEOPLE WITH PARTIAL SIGHT

Symbol canes enable people who are blind or visually impaired to establish the nature of their immediate surroundings. They also act as guides by locating obstacles in the path of the user. They are white in colour and therefore act as an indicator to those around that the user has a visual impairment. Various options are available including:

- different types of handgrip;
- folding or rigid canes;
- reflective markings;
- roller tips to increase the sensitivity of the cane.

White walking sticks are also available as walking aids for those people who are blind or visually impaired and also have difficulty mobilising.

Red tape can be wrapped around canes and sticks to indicate that they are being used by people who are both deaf and blind.

## TRIPODS AND QUADRUPODS

These walking aids have a walking stick style shaft and a three or four point base. They are therefore freestanding and are more stable than standard walking sticks. They are usually used singly rather than

in pairs; if used in pairs, the narrow base styles occupy less floor space and are therefore more practical.

Tripods and quadrupods are sometimes used by people who have had a stroke, although nowadays the focus of stroke rehabilitation has changed to encourage equal use of the affected and unaffected sides. Consequently, they are used less frequently because they tend to encourage an asymmetrical gait with the stronger, unaffected side leading.

## FEATURES TO CONSIDER

### Size of base

Tripods and quadrupods are available in narrow and wide based versions, the wide base offering greater stability. All can be used right or left-handed; the handgrip can be rotated through 180 degrees so that the spread of the base is away from the user.

### Elbow cuff

Some quadrupods incorporate an extension above the handgrip that terminates in an elbow cuff, similar to the cuff found on elbow crutches. This gives added security, by retaining the forearm in a position immediately above the handgrip.

## HOUSEHOLD TROLLEYS

Some household trolleys have been especially designed to provide a degree of walking support and may be appropriate to use if you are unsteady on your feet. They are designed for indoor use and their main advantage is that they enable items to be carried safely from room to room, and give the user security.

Trolleys that are pushed in front of the user should be used as an aid to confidence rather than for transference of body weight. Trolleys that have individual handgrips at either side can provide more support if their design allows the user to step into, rather than up to the trolley.

### FEATURES TO CONSIDER

#### Material

Wooden trolleys usually have wooden frames with melamine shelves. Their design allies them more closely to standard household trolleys and therefore their presence and use in the home may be more discreet.

Metal trolleys may be fixed or height adjustable. Height adjustment is via telescopic legs or handgrips.

#### Height



The trolley height must be comfortable for the individual user, which is usually waist height. Trolleys that have individual handgrips that could be used to provide a degree of walking support should be set at a height level with any existing, more recognised walking equipment such as a walking stick or frame. In the absence of a conventional walking device, the height should be measured to the wrist bone when the arms are relaxed down at the sides.

#### Shelves

Trolleys are available with one or two shelves; the bottom shelf is sometimes recessed to give space for the legs of the user when stepping forwards.

Others are designed with a recess at the side so that, when the user is sitting, the trolley can be turned sideways and the top tray used as a small table for mealtimes.



Some trolleys have removable trays which may help when transferring items or cleaning the tray.

## Wheels

The size of wheel will affect how smoothly the trolley travels over carpets and thresholds. Generally, larger wheels cope better than smaller wheels over higher thresholds and thick pile carpets. Front fixed wheels facilitate travel in a straight line; swivel wheels improve manoeuvrability in tight spaces and around corners.

## SHOPPING TROLLEYS

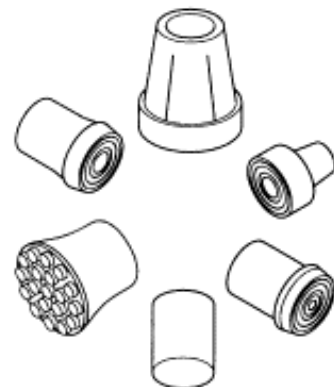


Some shopping trolleys, particularly those with four wheels, which are pushed in front of the user, can be used to provide security when walking outdoors. People who are steady on their feet but who lack walking stamina, for example people with breathing difficulties or a heart condition, and whose condition may be exacerbated by carrying heavy loads, may benefit from a shopping trolley that incorporates a seat. Some models fold so that they can be stored discreetly .

## ACCESSORIES FOR WALKING EQUIPMENT

### FERRULES

#### Standard ferrules



Ferrules must be replaced as soon as they show signs of excessive wear and tear. Different sizes are available to fit different diameters of shaft.

Replacements are usually available from the issuing authority if the walking aid has been loaned to you, otherwise contact the retail outlet that supplied your walking aid.

## Pivoting ferrules

These have a large, swivel base, which enable the walking stick or crutches to maintain full contact with the ground when used at an angle or on uneven surfaces.

## Shock absorbing ferrules

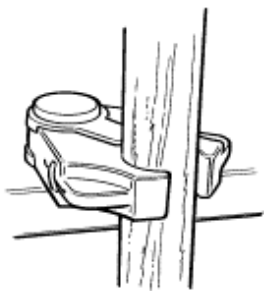
These incorporate a mechanism to absorb shock and may be particularly appropriate for people who are full-time users of crutches.

## Ice ferrules

These have a metal spike which provides a firm grip on snow and ice. The spike can be flipped up and down when not needed.

## HOLDERS

Props



These can be clipped around walking sticks or crutches. Several styles are available but they are all designed to support a stick in an upright position against, for example a table edge.

## Clips

These are U-shaped clips, which can be attached to wheelchairs or walking frames, and are used to secure sticks or crutches when not in use.

## Wrist loops

These can be attached to the top of a walking stick, and the loop can be placed around the person's wrist to keep the stick at hand.

## COMFORT HANDGRIPS

These can be fitted over the top of standard walking sticks and crutches to make them more comfortable to hold. They may be made of fleece, foam, rubber, terry towelling or gel.

## BAGS, BASKETS AND TRAYS



A bag, basket or tray can be attached to some walking frames. Trays can be clipped onto the top of the frame and folded forward or detached when not in use. Carrying items like this on mobile

frames will be more successful than on those that need picking up to be moved forwards. Care should be taken when using accessories that attach to the front of a walking aid as they will alter the balance of the device and may make it unstable. Net bags, apron style bags with pockets and wire baskets are available. Bags should not be attached to walking sticks or crutches. A shoulder bag worn diagonally across the shoulders may provide a solution to carrying less bulky items.

## **USEFUL ADDRESSES**

ASSIST UK (formerly DLCC)

Redbank House

4 St Chad's Street

Manchester, M8 8QA

Tel: 0870 770 2866;

Textphone: 0870 770 5813

Fax: 0870 770 2867

email: [general.info@assist-uk.org](mailto:general.info@assist-uk.org)

website: [www.assist-uk.org](http://www.assist-uk.org)

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

(CSP), 14 Bedford Row, London, WC1R

4ED (tel: (020) 7306 6666; fax: (020) 7306

6611; homepage: [www.csp.org.uk](http://www.csp.org.uk)).



## **DLF online**

The majority of DLF's advice is now online. If you would like advice and support to get online or information on local courses about getting online please visit one of the following websites.

### **Age UK**

<http://www.ageuk.org.uk/work-and-learning/technology-and-internet/>

Call **0800 169 8787**

### **BBC Webwise**

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/webwise/>

Call **08000 150 950**

### **Digital Unite**

<http://learning.digitalunite.com/category/using-the-internet/>

Call **0800 228 9272** Or you can write to them

Digital Unite Limited, Unit 2B Poles Copse, Poles Lane, Otterbourne, Winchester, SO21 2DZ

### **Go On**

<http://www.go-on.co.uk/>

Call 0800 77 1234

UK online centres, The Quadrant, 99 Parkway Avenue, Parkway Business Park, Sheffield, S9 4WG

### **UK Online Centre**

<http://www.ukonlinecentres.com/>

