
Discharge Instructions: Using a Cane

Your health care provider has advised you to use a cane. A cane can help you with balance as you get stronger and more mobile after surgery, illness, or injury. There are many kinds of canes. Some have only one tip. Others (quad canes) have four tips to aid balance. Here are some general guidelines for using a cane.

Making changes in your home

- Arrange your household to keep the items you need handy. Keep everything else out of the way.
- Remove things that may cause you to fall, such as small rugs or electrical cords.
- Use nonslip bath mats, grab bars, a raised toilet seat, and a shower chair in your bathroom.

Getting ready to use a cane

- Hold the cane on your stronger side unless your health care provider tells you otherwise.
- Standing up straight, check to see that the top of your cane reaches the crease in your wrist. When you hold your cane, your elbow should bend a bit.
- Place a nonskid rubber tip on the end of the cane to prevent slipping. If your cane has 4 tips, put a rubber tip on each tip. Change the tip(s) when worn.
- Don't carry things in your hands. Use a backpack, fanny pack, apron, or pockets to carry things.
- Be sure to tell your provider or physical therapist if your cane doesn't feel right. They can check the proper fit and make sure you are using your cane properly.

Walking with your cane

- Always wear walking shoes that fit well.
- Keep the cane away from your feet so that you don't trip.
- Walk carefully.
- Start walking by placing your cane about 1 small step ahead of you. Then step with your affected (weaker) side first. Finish the step with your stronger leg.
- Learn the safe way to climb stairs. Place your cane in the hand opposite your weaker side. Hold the handrail with the free hand. Bring your stronger leg up to the step. Then move the weaker leg and the cane to the same step. Move slowly, 1 step at a time.
- To come down stairs, put your free hand on the handrail. Put the cane on the first step down. Bring your weaker leg down to the first step. Then move the stronger leg to the same step.

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- Remember: Up with the good leg and down with the bad.

Follow-up care

Make a follow-up appointment with your health care provider, or as advised.

When to call your health care provider

Contact your health care provider right away if:

- You feel weaker or dizzy.
- You lose your balance or have any falls.
- Your symptoms come back or get worse.