



67°

New Haven Clear

Weather Alerts School/Other Closings

SITE SEARCH WEB SEARCH BY Google

HOME NEWS WEATHER VIDEO IWITNESS HEALTH BETTER CONNECTICUT SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT



Email Share | Print Text Size

## Using canes and walkers safely

Recommend Sign Up to see what your friends recommend.

By Eve Glicksman, Staff Writer, myOptumHealth



If you have trouble walking, your ability to live on your own takes a big hit. Some people find that using a cane or walker can make all the difference.

But a six-year government study now warns that using walking aids the wrong way can cause falls in older adults. In fact, more than 47,000 seniors ended up in emergency rooms in 2006 due to falls that involved walkers or canes. One in three required hospital stays, mostly for fractures. With an average of 129 cane- or walker-related injuries a day, authors of the study call it an underrecognized health problem.

But how can assistive devices designed to help people sometimes cause injuries? Doctors often recommend walking aids to help elderly patients avoid falls. But more direction may be needed.

A walking aid needs to be tailored to the body and needs of the person using it. Yet, some people simply borrow a cane or walker from a relative or friend. Accidents can occur if the cane or walker is not the right length or type, or if the person is never shown how to use the aid safely.

### Who should use a walking aid?

Canes and walkers can be invaluable. Shopping, for instance, may require long periods of standing and walking. If you have certain conditions, this can be impossible without an aid to lean on.

Walking aids enable many older adults to keep active and independent. They can reduce pain while walking or compensate for balance problems. Canes or walkers may be helpful for people with:

- Arthritis, especially in the knees or hips
- Instability from neuropathy or Parkinson's disease
- Balance and gait disorders



Talk with your doctor or a physical therapist about what type of walking aid would be best for you. © iStockphoto.com/Hasan Shaheed

- Cracking the case of arthritis
- Don't get tripped up: 5 ways to prevent falls
- Home-safe-home for seniors
- Move it or lose it: tips for improving your balance
- Preventing falls: a checklist
- Staying safe at home when you're disabled

- Foot or leg injuries
- Generalized weakness of hips or legs
- Limited endurance from heart or lung problems

In many cases, canes and walkers are reimbursable through [Medicare](#) and other insurers.

**Considerations**

Talk with your doctor or a physical therapist about what type of walking aid would be best for you. Keep these pointers in mind:

**For a cane**, you'll need to decide whether you want a single rubber tip on the bottom or four prongs. This will depend on how much weight you will be applying to it.

**For a proper fit**, bend your elbow at a 20-degree to 30-degree angle. Have someone measure the length between your wrist and the floor. With your arm at your side, the cane's top should be parallel to your wrist.

**Walkers are best** for people who need more stability than a cane provides. Walkers also let you shift more weight to your arms. You'll need a heavy-duty one if you're overweight.

**Wheels are an option** if a walker is too heavy for you to lift. You can get one with two or four wheels depending on your needs.

**Make sure the grip is comfortable** when you pick out a cane or walker.

**Get instructions**

If you don't use your walking aid correctly, you may trip when you try to bend, reach or carry an object. Or the cane or walker may interfere with your balance.

Ask your doctor or physical therapist for a lesson on how to use your walking aid safely. Some general tips:

- Hold your cane on the opposite side of your injury or weakness. Put your weight on your good leg.
- When using a walker, lean slightly forward and hold the walker for support. Your arms should be slightly bent.
- Place your cane or walker firmly on the ground before each step. Don't put it too far ahead of you.
- Check the nonskid rubber tips on your cane or walker often. Buy a replacement at a drugstore or medical supply store if the tip looks worn or uneven.

View the original [Using canes and walkers safely](#) article on [myOptumHealth.com](#)

**SOURCES:**

• American Geriatrics Society Foundation for Health in Aging. Canes and walkers. <b>Accessed:</b> 01/27/2010	• Brummel-Smith K, Dangiolo M. Assistive technologies in the home. <i>Clinics in Geriatric Medicine</i> . 2009;25(1):61-67.	• Stevens JA, Thomas K, Teh L, Greenspan AI. Unintentional fall injuries associated with walkers and canes in older adults treated in U.S. emergency departments. <i>Journal of the American Geriatrics Society</i> . 2009;57(8):1464-1469.	• Gross KD, Hillstrom H. Knee osteoarthritis: primary care using noninvasive devices and biomechanical principles. <i>Medical Clinics of North America</i> . 2009;93(1):179-200.
--	---	---	--

**myOptumHealth.com tools**

[Calories Burned Calculator](#)

[Symptom Checker](#)

[Create a Personal Health Record](#)

[Healthy Weight Calculator](#)

[Drug Interactions Calculator](#)

[Research Diseases & Conditions](#)

**More from myOptumHealth**

[More>>](#)

[Top 10 super-nutritious foods](#)

[Take the sting out of summer](#)

[Simple meals for singles](#)

[Recognizing dyslexia in children](#)

[Take a break from stress: Why we need vacations](#)

[7 healthy foods -- and how to make them healthier](#)

[Caregivers: Take care of yourself, too](#)

[Lawnmower safety: How to avoid injury](#)

[Tempting toddler meal ideas](#)

[Stay on track with high blood pressure treatment](#)

Sponsored



### The New "Skinny" Fruit

How this strange African fruit is making Americans skinny. [Learn more](#)

## More Stories We Think You'll Be Interested In



Van der Sloot charged with murder  
1 day ago



Gunman takes restaurant employees hostage  
1 day ago



Matthew Fox accused of punching woman  
2 days ago



College football player dies from practice hit  
2 days ago



60-foot 'astronomical' high tide hits China  
2 days ago



Baby found dead at grocery store  
2 days ago



Shoppers strip down to underwear for free clothes  
2 days ago



Awakened coma victim disappears  
4 weeks ago

Powered by [Vertical Acuity](#)

Content provided by:



These Web sites are for your informational use only. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice. It may not represent your true individual medical situation. Do not use this information to diagnose or treat a health problem or disease without consulting a qualified health care provider. Also consult your healthcare provider before starting any medications or supplements or beginning or modifying any exercise program.

© 2011 OptumHealth, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of information on this page may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, without the written permission of OptumHealth, Inc.



Ambler - New trick allows any Pennsylvania resident to get extremely cheap car insurance.



Advertisement : Mom discovers \$9 car insurance trick. Auto insurers are scared you will learn this too.



[Aug 2011]: Pennsylvania drivers with no DUIs may be eligible for \$9 per week car insurance.



Can't sleep? A new, all-natural supplement is helping people fall asleep faster and sleep all night.



Top cruise lines are giving away their unsold cabins...



People are buying their dream home with help from penny stocks...

**STATION**

- [Program Schedule](#)
- [Meet the Staff](#)
- [Community Calendar](#)
- [Closed Captioning](#)
- [EEO Information](#)
- [FCC 398 Children's Television Programming Report](#)
- [Employment](#)

**NEWS**

- [Hartford County](#)
- [New Haven County](#)
- [Middlesex County](#)
- [New London County](#)
- [Litchfield County](#)
- [Windham County](#)
- [Tolland County](#)
- [Fairfield County](#)

**WEATHER**

- [7 Day Forecast](#)
- [Maps and Radar](#)
- [Technical Discussion](#)
- [School Closings](#)
- [Email Alerts](#)



All content ©Copyright 2000 - 2011, WFSB, Hartford, CT. (A Meredith Corporation Site) For more information on this site, please read our [Privacy Policy](#)