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Patient Instructions

Canes

YOUR DOCTOR MAY RECOMMEND A CANE IF YOU HAVE WEAKNESS ON ONE SIDE OF YOUR BODY OR IF YOU HAVE POOR BALANCE. YOUR DOCTOR OR PHYSICAL THERAPIST WILL HELP YOU SELECT THE CANE THAT'S BEST FOR YOU.

LEARNING ABOUT CANES:

Hold the cane in the hand opposite your weaker side and flex your elbow at a 30-degree angle. If the cane is adjustable, you can adjust it by pushing in the metal button on the shaft and raising or lowering the shaft. If the cane is wooden, you or a helper can remove the rubber safety tip, saw off any excess wood, and replace the tip. Available in several types, canes can be standard, straight-handles, or broad-based.

STANDARD CANES:

The doctor will recommend a standard cane if you will be going up and down stairs often. Made of wood or metal, a standard cane commonly comes in 34 to 42 inch (86 to 107 centimeter) sizes. It features a single foot and a half-circle handle. It is usually inexpensive, easy to use, and hooks onto your bent arm when you are going up or down stairs, and onto the back of a chair when you sit down. If your hand perspires, you may lose your grip on a metal handle. Also, a metal handle may feel uncomfortable in hot or cold weather, so it is best to choose a cane with a wooden or plastic handle.

STRAIGHT-HANDLES CANES:

The doctor will recommend a straight-handles cane if your hand is weak. Made of wood, plastic, or metal, a straight-handles cane has easy-to-hold handgrips and a rubber safety tip. When you are selecting one, make sure the handgrip is not too thick or too thin for you to hold comfortably and that the cane is the proper height. Because this cane does not hook over railings or chair arms, you can place it on the floor near you when you sit down.

BROAD-BASED CANES:

This lightweight, metal cane has three or four prongs or legs that provide a sturdy supportive base. The height can be adjusted, and extra-long handles and child sizes are also available. A broad-based cane stands upright when not in use. Cane bases range from narrow to wide. A narrow broad-based cane fits on the standard stair step in the normal cane position, whereas a side broad-based cane fits on the step in you turn the

cane sideways. Usually, the narrower the cane's base, the less you tend to rely on it for support.

WALKING WITH A CANE:

You can use the following guidelines for walking with a cane if your left leg is weaker. If your right leg is weaker, start with the cane on your left side, and adapt the instructions. You may want to draw the step patterns for yourself.

1. First, make sure you always wear nonskid, flat-soled, supportive shoes that fit securely (loose laces can be hazardous). Avoid wearing sandals or clogs, because they do not support your weight properly. Next, check your cane's rubber tip to make sure it has no cracks or tears and is wearing evenly. Also, make sure the tip fits securely and evenly. If possible, remove throw rugs and avoid walking on slippery, wet or waxed floors, or on gravel driveways. Try to walk close to a wall so you have something to lean against if you drop your cane.
2. Now, position the cane about 4 inches (10 centimeters) to the side of your stronger leg. Distribute your weight evenly between your feet and your cane.
3. Shift your weight to your stronger leg and move the cane about 4 inches in front of you.
4. Now you are ready to move your weaker foot forward so it is even with the cane.
5. Shift your weight to your weaker leg and the cane. Now, move your stronger leg forward, ahead of the cane. If you've done this step correctly, your heel will be slightly beyond the tip of the cane.
6. Next move your weaker foot forward, so it is even with your stronger foot. Then move your cane in front of you about 4 inches. Repeat these steps. As you proceed, remember to keep your head erect, shoulders back, and back straight. Hold your abdomen in and keep your knees slightly flexed.