

FOREARM CRUTCHES

Purpose

The usual purpose of forearm crutches is to aid the user in walking while relieving weight from one foot or leg. The user must have adequate upper body and upper arm strength and must always abide by recommended procedures. When properly used, forearm crutches can provide longterm stability assistance to an individual while walking. Forearm crutches are not designed to support the full weight of the user. Your physician or therapist has ordered your crutches for a specific reason. If your physician or therapist has given you specific instructions, follow them. If you have not seen a therapist or physician, we recommend that you do so.

Types

Forearm crutches (sometimes called Canadian crutches) are most commonly used by individuals that need longterm stability assistance. Crutches also come in an underarm model (see Underarm Crutches Patient Education Sheet). Forearm crutches are commonly manufactured out of aluminum. They have a limited ability to adjust size, so they have markings that state their size limits. Make sure you read and understand all manufacturers' operating instructions.

All forearm crutches have a maximum weight limit that they can support. It is important to understand the limits and capacities of your crutches:

Weight of user (stated by user) is _____ pounds.
Maximum weight capacity of crutches is _____ pounds.

Use

Forearm crutches have two adjustments: height and cuff adjustment. The height of the crutches should be set first. Forearm crutches should be adjusted for height when wearing the shoes you will be wearing while using the crutches. The height should be adjusted when the user is standing straight with shoulders squared. The height of the handgrip should be at the crease of the wrist when the arm is hanging loosely at the side. The cuff should be adjusted to 1-2 inches below the bend of the elbow. The handgrip position should provide a 20 - 30 degree bend in the elbow when the user is standing up straight. Widen or narrow the crutch cuffs to provide a secure fit around the arms of the user. Make sure all connections are tight or have fully engaged spring buttons or locking collars. Your physician or therapist may determine different forearm crutch adjustments and uses from those described in this educational sheet.

The method of walking that medical equipment suppliers teach is called the Three-Point-Gait. While standing up straight, shift your weight to the good leg and bend your injured leg. Move both crutches and the weaker leg forward simultaneously; then the stronger extremity is moved forward while placing most of the body weight on the arms.

Never negotiate steps unless your physician or therapist has recommended that you do so. This is a potentially dangerous practice and needs specific training and monitoring. Always practice safe crutch walking. Never attempt to walk at an accelerated pace, this can cause you to slip and fall.

Safety

The safe use of crutches requires it to be used as instructed, which includes the following safety precautions:

- Check the security of the handgrips.
- Ensure that handgrips pads are present and in good condition.
- Ensure that all snap buttons protrude through the adjusting holes.
- Ensure that the locking collars or wing nuts are tight.
- Do not go up or down steps without approval from your physician or therapist.

In order to ensure care and provide operator safety, make sure you follow these safety guidelines:

- Use nightlights to increase vision around areas of use.
- Wipe up any water or slippery floor spills.
- Remove tripping hazards (loose floorboards, uneven floors, throw rugs, extension cords, clutter, etc.)
- Install grab bars, use bath mats with suction cups, and use elevated toilet seats to prevent falls.
- Do not use crutches when taking any medications that may cause dizziness, drowsiness, and/or unsteadiness.

Maintenance

The handgrips are very important and you should inspect them regularly. Worn or damaged handgrips or crutch tips must be replaced immediately. The handgrips should also be checked for movement or slippage on a regular basis and replaced if damaged. Ensure that the snap button releases and engages properly, and that any locking collars fully lock the crutches from moving.

Your crutches, if maintained properly, can last for many years. The rubber tips are there to provide traction on walking surfaces. These tips must always be in good working condition. The handgrips are there to provide better gripping of the crutch and to provide cushioning. These should also be changed immediately when they are cracked or become uncomfortable to grasp.