

FOLDING WALKER

Purpose

Walkers are designed to provide a lightweight and stable assistive device for ambulating. When properly used, a walker can provide added stability and assistance to an individual while walking. Walkers are not designed to support the full weight of the user. Your physician or therapist has ordered your walking aid 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

Walkers come in a variety of styles and sizes, each with a specific purpose. Walkers can come with seats, brakes, baskets, and/or wheels. Make sure you read and understand all manufacturers' operating instructions. Folding walkers are just as strong as non-folding walkers and have the added convenience of compact storage.

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

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

Use

A properly fitted walker is adjusted for height when wearing the shoes that you will be wearing while using the walker. The top of the handgrips should be approximately at the hip joint and the elbows will be slightly bent (20 - 30 degree angle). Make sure that all walker legs are adjusted to the same height, and if the walker is foldable, make sure it is securely locked in the open position before using. Your physician or therapist may determine different walker adjustments and uses from those described in this educational sheet.

Your wrists must be straight and firmly grasping the handgrips. Your first step should be even with the back two legs of the walker, followed by a second step into the middle of the walker. The walker is then moved forward, stepping through the walker last (exactly the same as a normal walk). The feet do not meet side by side unless stopping for a reason. If your walker has a seat, the brake must be fully engaged when utilizing the seat. When using a folding walker, it is important that you make sure the spring buttons are fully engaged.

Safety

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

- Do not use the walker without first reading and understanding the manufacturer's operating instructions.
- Check the security of the handgrips.
- Check the walker and verify that all attachments are securely engaged before using.
- Check to make sure that the rubber tips and/or plastic glide tips are not damaged or missing.
- Do not hang anything on or around the locking pin; this may depress the button.
- Do not hang anything on the side support frames.
- Ensure that all snap buttons protrude through the adjusting holes of each leg.
- Ensure that wheel accessories are only used on front walker legs.
- Ensure that the walker is adjusted so the height is even.
- Use only parts, accessories, or adapters authorized by the walker manufacturer.

If the walker is to be used in environments that are above 100° F (32° C) or have high humidity or conditions that will cause the walker to get wet, the operator must ensure that the handgrips are secure; these types of environments may cause the handgrips to twist. Always use caution when using a walker on any wet or icy surface.

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 a walker when taking any medications that may cause dizziness, drowsiness, and/or unsteadiness.

Maintenance

The rubber tips and wheels on your walker are very important and you should inspect them regularly. Worn or damaged tips and wheels must be replaced immediately. Medical supply companies stock a wide variety of walker tips and wheels that are inexpensive. The handgrips should be checked for movement or slippage on a regular basis and be replaced if damaged. Braking mechanisms should be checked for braking ability at least monthly. If your walker does not brake completely, please bring it in for an adjustment.

Wheels should be kept clean by rinsing with warm water and a mild cleanser. Make sure the walker is completely dry before using. Lubricate squeaky wheels with a small amount of 3-in-1® oil.

Accessories

Walkers have many styles of wheels. Walkers with two wheels are very common and wheels must be in the front position. Walkers with four wheels must have a braking mechanism due to the increased chance the walker will roll, causing a loss of balance.

Braking mechanisms vary in their performance and braking ability, the user must comply fully with the manufacturer's operating procedures. Most medical equipment suppliers stock many different types of walkers with brakes and brake add-ons.

Gliding mechanisms may have come on your walker or may be added as an additional accessory. These gliding surfaces are designed to allow easier sliding across ground surfaces. Gliding mechanisms are recommended only for the rear legs of a walker; it is not recommended that gliding tips be used on all four walker legs.

If using walker gliding mechanisms, it is recommended that the operator take short steps to assure weight is distributed evenly and directly over walker legs.

Baskets and trays can be added to a walker to make it more functional for the activities of daily living. Many of these models are designed to fit specific walkers, so make sure you bring your walker with you when adding additional items.