

# How to Use Crutches

## Why should I use crutches?

If you have had an injury, a surgery, or a procedure on your leg or foot, it may need time to heal. To help it heal and to prevent pain, you need to keep all your weight off it. Using crutches will help you get around without putting any weight on your leg.

At first, using crutches may seem difficult. With a little training and practice, though, most people learn to walk safely with crutches. This fact sheet provides tips for using crutches safely.

## How do I prepare to use crutches?

Using crutches will be easier and safer if you prepare for success. Do these things before you start using crutches:

- **Remove tripping hazards.** Make sure there are no throw rugs, electrical cords, spills, or clutter that might cause you to trip or fall.
- **Arrange your household.** If necessary, move furniture to make sure you will have plenty of room to get around. Put things you use often within easy reach.
- **Prepare your bathroom.** Use hand rails, a raised toilet seat, and a seat in the shower or tub to help prevent falling in the bathroom. Wet surfaces in the bathroom can be very slippery.
- **Get a back pack or fanny pack.** Carry things in a hands-free bag or pack. Your hands will need to be on your crutches.
- **Wear shoes that fit well and stay on.** Don't wear loose sandals. Be especially careful to wear good shoes in wet or snowy weather.

## How should my crutches fit?

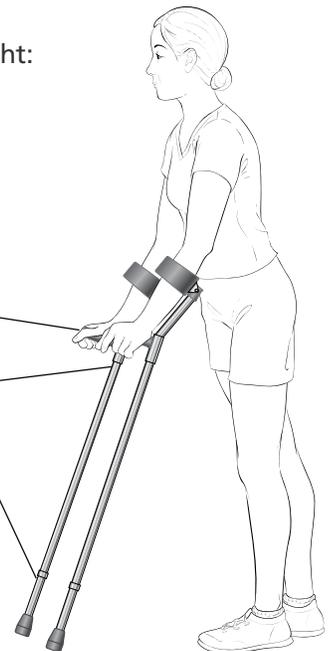
You may be given forearm crutches (also called elbow crutches) or underarm crutches.

### Forearm crutches

When standing up straight:

- The cuff should be about 1 to 2 inches below where your elbow bends.
- The hand grip should hit about where your wrist bends.

Use the buttons to adjust the length of the crutches.



### Underarm crutches

When standing up straight:

- The underarm supports should fit about 2 inches below your armpits.
- Your weight should rest on your hands, not on the underarm supports.

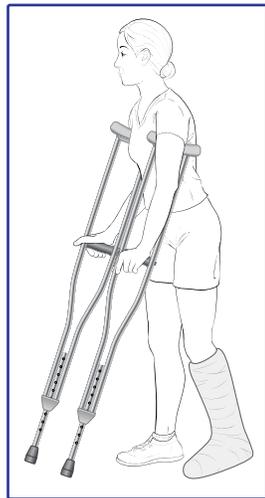
Use the bolts to adjust the length of the crutches and the height of the hand grips.

## How do I walk with crutches?

For simplicity, these instructions use the word “good” to refer to your non-injured leg. The word “bad” refers to your injured leg.

Your weight should be on the crutches when moving your “good” leg. Be sure to support your weight on your hands and not your armpits. Then, follow this pattern:

- Lean on your “good” leg.
- Lean forward slightly, and move both crutches about a foot in front of you.
- Begin your step as if you were going to use the “bad” leg, but instead shift your weight to your crutches.
- Finish the step with your “good” leg.
- Focus on where you want to go, not on your feet.



## How do I sit down?

Only sit in chairs that are sturdy. Make sure the seat is high enough that you won’t have to fall into it. If necessary, add pillows. Then, do this:

- Back up to the chair.
- Hold your “bad” leg a little bit in front of you, and put both crutches in the hand on the side of your “good” leg.
- Reach down with your free hand, and hold the arm or seat of the chair. Slowly lower yourself.
- Rest your crutches on their sides near your chair.

## How do I stand up?

- Slide yourself to the front of the chair.
- Hold both crutches in the hand on the side of your “good” leg.
- Put all your weight on the “good” leg, and push yourself up.

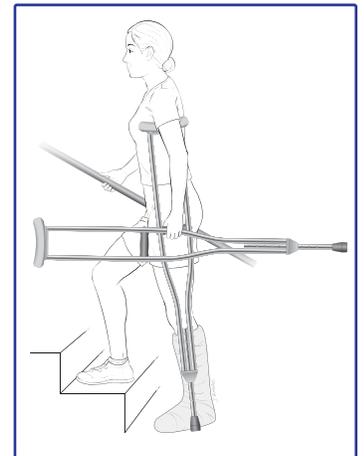
## How do I go up and down stairs?

When using the stairs, remember the phrase, “Up with the good, down with the bad.” That is, when going up the stairs, lead with your “good” leg. When going down, lead with your “bad” leg. To go up or down, start close to the stair and hold the handrail with one hand. In the other hand, hold both crutches:

- Use 1 crutch to support yourself.
- In the same hand as the supporting crutch, hold the other crutch horizontally with your fingers.

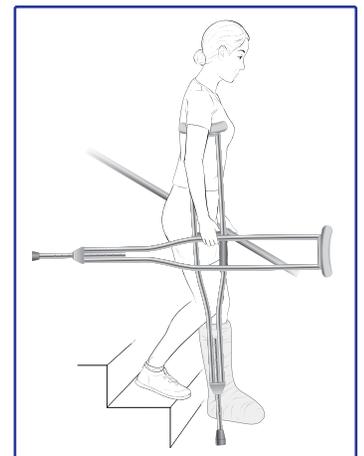
### To go up stairs:

- Have someone walk behind you the first few times you climb the stairs.
- Keep the crutch on the step you’re standing on. Then, step up with your “good” leg.
- Push down on the crutch, and step up with the “bad” leg.
- When both feet are on the upper step, bring your crutch up.



### To go down stairs:

- Have someone walk in front of you the first few times you go down the stairs.
- Put your crutch on the lower step.
- Bring your “bad” leg down.
- Step down with your “good” leg.



If you don’t feel steady, you may have to sit on each step and move up or down on your bottom. This may not be your favorite way to get around, but it can help you use the stairs safely and prevent a fall.

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