Using Assistive Devices

As you recover and heal from joint replacement surgery, your new joint needs to be protected while it is healing. You will use an assistive device such as a walker or crutches to aid you with walking after your surgery. Also, your doctor and your physical therapist will instruct you in how much weight you are allowed to put on your operative leg after surgery.

Using a Walker

- **Standing with a walker**

  1. Slide your hips forward to the edge of the bed, chair or toilet seat. Keep your operative leg outstretched and your good leg beneath you on the floor.

  2. Use your arms to push down on the edge of the bed, chair arms or toilet seat, and lift yourself up.
3. Shift your weight onto your good leg and move your hands to the hand grips of the walker. Bring your operative leg back as you fully straighten your good leg.

4. Do not pull yourself up with the walker because you may fall backwards.

5. Make sure you are steady and balanced before taking a step.

6. If you have had both joints replaced:
   A. Scoot yourself forward as noted in Step 1. Push down with both of your arms, straightening the elbows.
   B. Lift yourself off the chair and gradually walk your legs back and beneath you.
   C. Transfer your weight from your arms to your legs and take hold of the walker.
Walking with a walker

1. Lift the walker and place it at a comfortable distance in front of you with all four of its legs on the floor. This distance is usually equal to an arm’s length.

2. Move your operative leg toward the walker first. Then take a step with your good leg, bringing it slightly ahead of the operative leg. If you have had surgery on both sides, it does not matter which leg you use to begin walking.

3. Do not take big steps that place you too close to the walker. There should be space between you and the walker at all times. If you are too close, you may lose your balance.

4. Hold your head up and look straight ahead. It is tempting to watch your feet, but more tiring, and you may run into something.

5. Be sure to walk slowly.
Sitting with a walker

1. Slowly back up to the chair, bed or toilet until you feel it against the back of your legs.

2. Let go of the walker and reach back for the bed, chair arms or toilet seat, while sliding your operative leg forward.

3. Slowly lower yourself onto the seat by leaning forward and keeping your operative leg outstretched in front of you. Go slowly so that you do no “plop” into the chair.

4. If you have had both joints replaced, place both hands on the chair arms, bed or commode seat as noted above. Lower yourself to the seat and gradually walk both legs forward. Again, do not “plop” down.
Going up stairs with a walker

Always remember, when climbing stairs, start with your good leg going up, and start with your operative leg going down. **Up with the good, down with the bad!** When going up and down stairs with a walker, you also should have a sturdy handrail.

1. Approach the stairs and place your feet about six inches from the first step.

2. Fold the walker and place it in one hand. Place your other hand on the rail.

3. Lift the folded walker and set it to the back of the step.

4. Step up first with your good leg, and then bring up your operative leg.
5. At the top of the stairs, unfold walker and set it on the landing. Make sure you hear the walker click into locked position. Place both hands on the walker.

6. Step up first with your good leg, and then bring up your operative leg.

- **Going down stairs with a walker**
  1. Approach the stairs and place your walker about two inches from the top step.
  2. Fold the walker and place it in one hand. Place your other hand on the rail.
3. Set the folded walker down and to the front edge of the first step.

4. Step down first with your operative leg, and then bring down your good leg.

5. At the bottom of the stairs, unfold the walker and set it on the landing. Make sure you hear the walker click into locked position.

6. Place both hands on the walker. Step down first with your operative leg and then with your good leg.
- Going up a curb with a walker: Forward Method
  - Walk straight up to the curb.
  - Put all four legs of the walker up on the curb.
  - Push straight down on the walker when stepping up with the good leg.
  - Step up with the operative leg.

- Going up a curb with a walker: Backward Method
  - Walk up to the curb and turn so your back is to the curb.
  - Step up on the curb with your good leg.
  - Step up on the curb with your operative leg.
  - Lift the walker and put all four legs up on the curb.
  - Turn back around carefully.

- Going down a curb with a walker
  - Walk up to the edge of the curb.
  - Put all four legs of the walker on the ground below.
  - Step down with your operative leg, then your good leg.

Never go down a curb backwards.
Using your crutches safely

- It is very important to place your weight on your hands. You should not be leaning or placing your weight on your armpits. Your crutches will be adjusted so they are not high up in your armpits. Nerve damage can result if weight is placed on the armpits for a long period of time.

- Keep your elbows close to your sides to help keep the crutches against your chest.

- Your crutch tips should be 2 to 3 inches out to the side of your feet so you do not trip on your crutches.

- There should be a slight bend in your elbow when holding onto the crutches (15 to 20 degrees).

- Take your time and do not try to walk too fast.

- Keep your head up and look ahead. Do not look at your feet when walking.

- Make sure the crutch tips, grips and pads are in place on the crutches before using them for safety.

- When walking on carpet you must pick up your crutches and injured leg more than when you walk on tile or linoleum floors. Put away all throw rugs on the floor to keep from falling.
Standing with crutches

1. Slide your hips forward to the edge of the chair, bed or toilet seat. Keep your operative leg outstretched, and your good leg beneath you.

2. Place both crutches in the hand on your operative side, by grasping the hand pieces with your palm turned downward.

3. Raise yourself up by pushing on the crutches in your one hand, and down on the bed, chair arm, or elevated toilet seat with your other hand. Bear weight on your good leg as you stand.

4. When you are standing, place one crutch under each arm. For ease in balancing, your crutches should be slightly forward and about 3 inches out from your feet on each side.
Walking with crutches

1. Place both crutches ahead of you at a comfortable distance (usually about 1 foot).

2. Step forward with your operative leg. With both knees replaced, it does not matter which foot you use to begin your steps.

3. Step with your good leg, bringing it through the crutches and past the operative leg as with a normal step.

4. Move your crutches forward to balance. Continue to walk by repeating the above steps.
Sitting with crutches

1. Back up to the chair, bed or commode until you feel it against the back of your legs.

2. With the hand on your operative side, grasp both crutches by the hand pieces. Slide your operative leg slightly ahead of you.

3. Reach back with the hand on your good side for the chair arm, bed or elevated toilet seat.

4. Lower yourself slowly onto the bed, chair, or commode. Be careful not to “plop” down.

5. Place your crutches within easy reach.
Going up stairs with crutches

- **Without use of railing:**
  1. Allow about 2 inches between your feet and the first step.
  2. Push down on your crutches and step up with your good leg.

- **With use of railing:**
  1. When going up stairs with crutches, we recommend using a railing. Put both crutches under the opposite arm where the railing is located and use the rail as you would your second crutch.
  2. Place your weight on your good leg then bring your crutches and operative leg up to that step. Take a few moments to get your balance.

Going down stairs with crutches

- **Without use of railing:**
  1. On the upstairs landing, rest your operative leg forward on the edge of the step.
  2. Put both crutches on the step below. Place the crutches near the front edge of the step to help you keep your balance.
  3. Bring your operative leg down to the step with the crutches.
  4. Push down on your crutches and slowly lower your good leg.
• **With railing:**
  > When going down stairs with crutches, we recommend using a railing. Put both crutches under the opposite arm where the railing is located and use the rail as you would your second crutch. Go down the stairs as you were taught with 2 crutches.

• **With help:**
  > If someone is helping you on the stairs, he/she should stand behind you while going up, and in front of you when coming down. This person should not hold onto your arms, but should support your trunk and body.
Using a Cane

Walking with a cane

1. Cane length should be adjusted so that when you are standing, the handle of the cane is at the level of your wrist.

2. Hold the cane on the side of your good leg unless directed otherwise by your physical therapist.

3. Begin by stepping forward with your operative leg and cane, keeping the two parallel to each other.

4. Next, step forward with your good leg, bringing it ahead of the operative leg and cane.
Going up stairs with a cane

1. Grasp the hand rail with your free hand. Begin by raising your good leg up to the first step.

2. Then bring your operative leg and cane together up to the same step. Keep your leg and cane parallel to each other.
• Going down stairs with a cane

1. Approach the stairs and put your feet near the steps.

2. Place your cane on the first step down.

3. Place your operative leg on the first step down. Then bring your good leg to the same step.

4. Repeat above steps until you are at the bottom of the stairs.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.