Crutchwalking
Disclaimer

This is general information developed by The Ottawa Hospital. It is not intended to replace the advice of a qualified health-care provider. Please consult your health-care provider who will be able to determine the appropriateness of the information for your specific situation.
Introduction

For the next little while, you will need the help of crutches in order to walk safely. We hope that this booklet will assist you in learning to handle the crutches easily and comfortably.

There are many kinds of crutches in use today and all are handled in a similar way. The type of crutch chosen for you depends on your specific needs. The most common type of crutch is one that reaches your armpit.

One very important part to successful crutchwalking is the correct height of the crutch. To determine the height, the nurse or physiotherapist will have you stand, while wearing low-heeled sturdy walking shoes.

Measuring Crutches

Stand with the crutch under your arm against your rib cage and the rubber tips of the crutch about 15 cm (6 inches) to the side of your toes. There should space for 3 fingers between your armpit and the top of your crutch. The handle should be placed at the height of your wrist with your arm straight down. When you grab the handle your elbows should be slightly bent. This will be the correct height for the crutch.

*The top of your crutch should never press against the armpit.*
Your body weight should always be carried on your hands. Never rest on the top of your crutches. Leaning on the top of your crutches can cause serious nerve damage to your arm. Remember to stand up straight. Your crutches should have a rubber stopper at the end of each one. Be sure that the rubber stoppers are in good condition to prevent slipping.

**Weightbearing With Crutches**

After an injury or surgery, you may not be allowed to put all of your weight through the leg. Always check with your doctor or physiotherapist to see how much weight you can put through your leg. You may be shown how to walk using one of the following methods:

**Non-weightbearing (NWB)**
You are not allowed to put any weight through the affected leg. This means that you must keep your foot off the ground.

**Toe-touch weightbearing (TTWB)**
You are only able to just touch the floor with the toes of your affected leg but do not push down.

**Partial weightbearing (PWB)**
You are able to put half of your weight through the affected leg. This means you still have to push through your hands using the crutches.

**Weightbearing as tolerated (WBAT) or Full Weightbearing (FWB)**
You can put as much weight as you can through the affected leg to full weight.
**Helpful Hints**

Your age and stability will determine how quickly you will walk, no matter what type of crutchwalking you are doing.

Never take such a large step that you may fall. Be sure to rest when you become tired. Do not attempt to walk long distances all at once.

**How to Walk With Crutches**

Now you are ready to begin crutchwalking. Keep your crutches apart about the width of your hips so you can go through without touching the crutches. Putting them closer together or further apart may lead to a fall. Remember it is important to maintain a straight posture at all times.

Look forward and keep your head up. Take short steps.
Non-Weight Bearing Walk

In a non-weightbearing walk, you advance both crutches first and keep your affected (A) leg off the ground. Step forward with your unaffected leg (G) by taking your body weight through your hands on the crutches. Remember to keep your affected (A) leg off the ground.
Toe-Touch Weightbearing and Partial Weightbearing Walk

In a toe-touch and partial weight bearing walk, you advance both crutches and the affected (A) leg at the same time. Your body weight is taken almost entirely by your hands on the crutches. The affected leg only touches the floor lightly as your good (G) leg is brought through in front of the crutches.
Weightbearing as Tolerated or Full Weightbearing Walk

In a weightbearing as tolerated or full weightbearing walk, you move both crutches and the affected (A) leg forward at the same time. You may bear your weight on your affected (A) leg. Then step through with your good (G) leg.
Stairs

An easy slogan to remember for stair climbing is “Up with the good and down with the bad”. It is safer to use a railing if it is available.

On each step, make sure that you place your good foot fully on the step and that crutches are in the centre of the step.

Remember to place only the weight allowed on the affected (A) leg.

If the railing is on the right hand side of the stairs, first put both crutches on your left side, one under your arm and grasp the other in the left hand. Take the railing in your right hand. Place your good leg on the first step, then push up on the crutch, the railing, and straighten the good (G) knee at the same time. Bring your affected (A) leg and your crutches up at the same time onto the same step. Repeat this procedure until you reach the top of the stairs.

If your railing happens to be on the opposite side then simply reverse which hand holds the railing.

When going down with a railing, place your crutches the same way in your left hand and take the railing in your right hand. Bring your crutches and your affected (A) leg down to the next step. Lean on the railing and the crutch, and bend your good (G) knee. Step down to the same step.
To climb the stairs without a railing, begin close to the bottom step. With your weight on your hands and crutches, put your good (G) leg on the first step. Then straighten your good (G) leg, and lift both your crutches and your affected (A) leg up to the same step. Remember to take your weight on your affected (A) leg as allowed.

Repeat this procedure until you reach the top of the stairs.

To go down stairs, begin by placing your crutches and your affected (A) leg on the lower step. Take your body weight on your hands and on your affected (A) leg as allowed. Then with your good (G) leg bend the knee as much as possible. To assist in balance, lean on the handgrips of the crutches and bring your good (G) leg down to the same step.
**Chairs**

Sitting down in a chair may seem difficult, but can be easily done in the following way.

First, stand in front of the chair with the back of your leg touching the chair. Then, take the crutches from under your arms and pass them to one hand. Grasp both by the handgrip, with the other hand hold the chair (armrest if present). Bend forward slightly and sit down.

![Image of a person sitting down in a chair with crutches]

To stand up, sit at the front edge of the chair. Put the good leg on the ground. Grasp the handles of both crutches with one hand and the other on the chair (armrest if present). Lean forward and push up off the chair. Raise your body to a standing position.

Pass one crutch over to the other side. Be sure to have a steady balance before beginning to walk.
Conclusion

In the beginning, you may have found that crutchwalking was difficult and that you felt unsteady, but by following the basic steps carefully, you will find that you will master this skill.

Crutchwalking can offer you increased mobility and independence when it is done correctly and safely.