



Care Partner Information

Tips for Providing Older Adult Care

Canes

Many older adults use a cane to help with balance, injuries or mild pain. Different types of canes work better for different needs. A doctor, physical therapist or other health care provider can help pick the best cane for the person, and show them how to correctly use it. When used right, a cane can help with pain or prevent a fall. But if a cane is not used right, it can cause more problems.

Types of Canes

Standard Canes

Standard canes are the most common type of cane. They are made of wood or aluminum and have a rubber tip at the bottom. The handle may be shaped like a hook or flat. Standard canes are good for people who need just a little help. They are not good for people with pain who need to lean on the cane a lot.



Multiple-Legged Canes

Some canes have three or four legs at the bottom. This type of cane stands on its own when the person is not using it. The person does not have to lean the cane on a chair or wall, or bend over to pick it up. The extra legs also make it more stable when standing or walking. These canes are better for people who have pain on one side, and need to lean on the cane a lot.

Some multiple-legged canes also have a second hand grip half-way down. These are called “sit-to-stand” canes. They can provide extra support for those who need extra help getting up or sitting down.



This Care Partner Information page is part of a series on older adult caregiving tips. They are written to help family and community caregivers, direct care workers and community health representatives care for older adults. Available in English and Spanish at www.aging.arizona.edu

Care Partner Information

It is important to make sure the cane is the right height for the person. Some canes can be made taller or shorter, but others cannot. Make sure the cane is the right size before using it.

How to Fit a Cane



Stand with the cane next to the stronger leg with the arm hanging straight down by the side. The top of the cane should be at the same height that the wrist bends. The elbow should bend a little when the cane is held in the hand.



How to Use a Cane

Hold the cane on the same side as the stronger “good” leg. This helps keep the weight on the stronger side. Do not use the cane on the side with pain or weakness. This can cause a fall.

How to Walk With a Cane

Take a step with the weaker or “bad” leg and bring the cane forward at the same time. Carefully place the cane to make sure it will not slip. If the cane has three or four legs, all legs should be flat on the ground before putting weight on the weak side. Last, bring your strong leg forward while leaning your weight through the arm holding the cane.

How to Go Up Curbs and Stairs

1. Hold the cane on the good side, and stand close to the curb or stair. Grab the handrail with the free hand.
2. Put the cane on top of the curb or stair. Make sure the cane bottom is placed flat.
3. Next, step up with the stronger leg. Then lift the weak leg up to the same stair. (If there is no handrail, place the cane on the upper step at the same time or after placing the weaker leg).

How to Go Down Curbs and Stairs

1. Hold the cane on the good side, and stand with toes behind the top step. Grab the hand rail with the free hand.
2. Put the cane down one step, and then step down with the weak leg.
3. Use the stronger leg to lower onto the stair. (If there is no rail, place the cane on the lower step at the same time or after lowering the stronger leg).

A good way to remember which leg goes first when going up and down stairs is “Up with the Good, Down with the Bad.”

Written By: Monica Zhovklyy, PT, DPT

Care Partner Information ~ Tips for Providing Older Adult Care

Edited by an interprofessional team from the University of Arizona Center on Aging