



JEFFREY A. KLEMES, D.P.M., F.A.C.F.A.S.

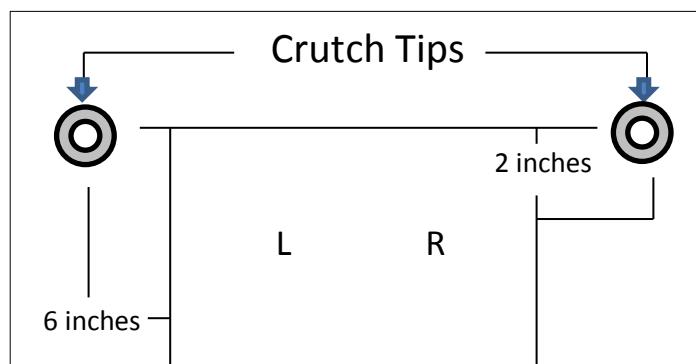
USING CRUTCHES

It is important to know how to use and adjust crutches to avoid problems caused by improper usage. Besides causing fatigue and frustration, ill-fitting crutches can damage axillary (armpit) nerves.

ADJUSTMENT

With feet and crutches in the position shown, the tops of the crutches should be two finger widths below your armpits. With wrists straight and elbows bent 25-30° the weight should be on your palms on the handgrips. You should wear well-fitting, low-heeled shoes with non-slip soles.

Support your weight on the handgrips, with your elbows nearly straight. Squeeze the axillary pad between your upper arms and ribcage; you will get better support and balance and you will tire out less quickly. Do not rest your weight on the axillary pads- the pressure on nerves and blood vessels in the armpits can cause “crutch palsy”, a numbness in the hands and arms which is almost temporary.



PROPER USE

The *three-point gait* (non-weight bearing on the affected side) is used when one leg is weak or cannot be used at all. The first step is to move your crutches and injured leg 12-15 inches ahead of the good leg. Then, swing your good leg to about 12-15 inches ahead of your crutches. Repeat. Walking on crutches is easier and faster if you move your injured leg in rhythm with your crutches.

The *touchdown weight bearing gait* (partial weight bearing on the affected side) is done by moving the crutches 12 inches ahead, then leading with the affected “bad” foot between to the crutches (using your hands and arms), then lift your “good” foot and step up to the bad foot between the crutches.

STAIRS

To go upstairs, support your weight on the handgrips while you move your good leg up one step. Put your body weight on your good leg while you move your crutches and injured leg up to the same step. To go down stairs, the order is reversed and your crutches and injured leg are moved first. Place the crutches at the back of the lower step. When your weight is on the handgrips, move the good leg to the same step. Don't put the crutches or the foot of your good leg at the edge of the step, because you could lose your balance and fall.

If the stairway has a handrail, use that for safer support instead of one of the crutches. The sequence for going up or down stairs is the same; put the weight you would put on one of the crutches on the handrail instead. Carry the unused crutch perpendicular to the crutch you are using, or hold both crutches upright and use them as one. Remember, with curbs or stairs, “The good go up; the bad go down”

Disclaimer: This is meant as a guide and is not to be substituted for proper medical care and explanation by your treating doctor. We have used all reasonable care in compiling the information but make no warranty as to its accuracy in specific situations. If there are any questions, please feel free to contact us.