

Quad Canes to Help With Walking

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What is a quad cane, and how can your physical therapist help you use a quad cane for walking?

A quad cane is a [mobility device](#) that aids walking and mobility. It is similar to a standard cane, but it has a metal base on the bottom with four small feet that extend from the base. These feet have rubber caps that help reduce slippage on the floor. Quad canes are usually made of lightweight aluminum and are adjustable with a small push button.

Who Should Use a Quad Cane

Occasionally after illness or injury, one or both of your legs may be weak. This weakness may prevent you from walking normally. An extended period of immobilization or bed rest may lead to changes in your balance. A quad cane helps provide extra support to allow you to walk independently and safely.

An advantage of a quad cane is that it provides good stability. Quad canes can also be used on stairs, unlike a standard or wheeled walker. While sitting, a quad cane can stand next to you and will not fall over. When rising from sitting, be sure not to use the quad cane to pull yourself out of the chair, as it may tip over. Stand up first, and then grab the handle.

Disadvantages

One disadvantage of a quad cane is that it requires you to walk a little more slowly. This can be a good thing if your gait and balance are compromised after injury or illness. But, if you're looking to walk somewhere quickly, a quad can will likely slow you down. A quad cane may also create a tripping hazard. With its big base, you may accidentally kick the bottom of your quad cane, leading to a loss of balance and a fall.

Types

There are basically two types of quad canes: wide and narrow base quad canes. Wide base quad canes (WBQC) have a larger base where the four legs are attached. This helps provide more support and improved stability while walking. A wide base quad cane is heavier and may be more difficult to maneuver. A narrow base quad cane (NBQC) has a narrower base where the legs are attached. Although this provides less support than a wide base quad cane, it is easier to lift and maneuver while walking.

Choosing a Quad Cane

When choosing a quad cane, it is important to work with your doctor and [physical therapist](#) to decide if a narrow or wide base quad cane is best for you. In general, limitations in your strength and balance will dictate which is best for you. With significant weakness or balance limitations, a wide base quad cane may be best. If your weakness and balance limitations are mild, a narrow base quad cane may be the best choice.

If you are currently walking with a [standard walker](#) or wheeled walker, progression to a quad cane may be warranted. Be sure to check with your doctor and physical therapist to see if a quad cane is appropriate for you. Your physical therapist can also teach you the proper way to walk with a quad cane. In general, you should advance the quad cane with your opposite leg. Once the cane and your foot are on the ground, your other foot can be advanced forward.

Sizing

Before walking with a quad cane, you must be sure it is the correct size for you. Most are [adjustable](#). Simply push the small button on the staff to adjust.

To be sure of the correct size, stand next to the cane with your arm at your side. If standing is difficult, be sure someone is nearby to [assist](#) you. The handle at the top of the cane should be at

the level of your wrist. When you grip the handle, your elbow should be bent slightly.

Walking With a Quad Cane

To walk with a quad cane, follow these simple steps.

1. Hold the cane in one hand. If one leg is weak, hold the cane in the hand opposite the weak leg.
2. Advance the quad cane forward about one arm's length. Be sure all four legs of the quad cane contact the floor to prevent tipping.
3. Step forward with the weak leg.
4. Gently press down into the handle of the quad cane with your hand to help with stability. Advance your other leg just slightly past to first foot.
5. Repeat this cycle.

Be sure your PT helps you set your quad cane up and avoid common mistakes that some folks make when walking with a cane.

When to Stop Using the Quad Cane

As your [strength](#) and balance improve, you may notice that walking is easier. When this occurs, it may be time to use a standard cane, which provides less support or use no device at all. Be sure to speak with your doctor and physical therapist to be sure that you are safe to stop using the quad cane. Occasionally, strength and balance limitations are permanent, and therefore, walking with the quad cane may be permanent as well.

A Word From Verywell

If you suffer an injury or illness, you may have weakness or balance issues that prevent you from walking. A quad cane can be an excellent device to use to help ensure you are able to walk safely and independently.

Article Sources

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1. Parry SM, Puthuchearu ZA. [The impact of extended bed rest on the musculoskeletal system in the critical care environment](#). *Extrem Physiol Med*. 2015;4:16. doi:10.1186/s13728-015-0036-7

Additional Reading

- Bateni, H., Collins, P., & Odeh, C. (2018). Comparison of the Effect of Cane, Tripod Cane Tip, and Quad Cane on Postural Steadiness in Healthy Older Adults. *JPO: Journal of Prosthetics and Orthotics*, 30(2), 84-89.