

Proper Use Of An Assistive Device

When individuals sustain certain injuries which require taking stress off of joints, they may be given an assistive device, such as a cane or crutch. There is often confusion of the proper technique and use of these, and sometimes can actually make other joints worse due to compensation. This article is meant to give general guidelines with the proper technique and use of these devices.

The goal of using assistive devices is to relieve stress from a joint to prevent further injury, and allow a proper healing environment. Depending on the injury determines the amount of time that a device should be used. Make sure to let your physician or physical therapist determine this. Also make sure that the device is properly fitted for you by your physician or therapist. With a crutch, 2 fingers should fit between the padding on the crutch and your arm pit. A cane should come to your wrist bone with your arms resting by your side.

When walking with the device, it should be on the opposite side than your affected limb. For example, if the left knee, hip, or ankle is injured, the cane or single crutch should be on the right side. Every time you take a step, you should move the cane or crutch with affected side. For example with a left sided injury, the cane or crutch should be moved out first, followed by the left leg, then the right. Always make sure to not lean all your weight on the assistive device, it is there to help you, not support all your body weight. The brachial plexus is a mass of nerves in your arm pit area and if leaning on with the crutch, larger injury can occur. While using an assistive device, if any tingling or other joint pain occurs, make sure to consult your physician.

The above is intended as general information only. Be sure to contact your physician for advice on your own specific medical problems. Have a question? Write to Questions from the Field, Gananda-Walworth Physical Therapy and Village Fitness, PO Box 162, Macedon, NY 14502, or send e-mail to gwpt@villagefit.com.