

The time may come, or may have long since arrived when you need an assistive device to move about safely. If that time isn't here yet feel free to skip today's article. The rest...read on. Though Deb Peavy and I want to applaud everyone's careful use of their walker, we can't help but notice those folks who lean over and put weight on their walkers. Some may have permanent spinal changes which require this, but the rest will be safer and avoid back, shoulder and neck strain if they remember how to use their walker correctly.

**The key is to keep you walker close and to stand up straight.** See figure one. Note how her center of gravity is out past her toes. This increases her risk of falls and contributes to sore back. In figure two note how the subject is tucked in close and the back is straight.

(insert pictures here.....) *labeled wrong and right?*

Be sure to make sure your walker is adjusted to the correct height. When you are standing up straight, your walker hand grip should line up with the crease in your wrist. When you grasp the handles, you should have a slight (about 15 degree) bend in your elbow.

To take your first step, place the walker about one step ahead of you. You should be able to keep your back straight throughout the movement. Next, step one leg inside the walker. You should not be touching the front bar. Step forward with your other leg to complete the step. Continue pushing the walker forward and walking up to meet it. Soon, this movement will become easy and natural. Remember, never use a walker on stairs or an escalator.

If you are considering purchasing a walker, one of your biggest decisions is whether or not to get wheels. While many traditional walkers do not have wheels, this is not necessarily the best option. Non-wheeled walkers can be cumbersome and difficult to use. Here are some points to consider when choosing a walker:

- Walkers without wheels offer the most support.
- If you have a walker without wheels, you must lift it to move forward. It will get caught on uneven surfaces such as thresholds or high pile carpet if not lifted.
- Walkers with front wheels are better equipped to accommodate uneven surfaces.
- Wheels add about one inch to the overall width of the walker.
- Four wheeled walkers should include brakes to make it easier to slow and stop. These "rollators" also have a bench to rest on and use like a tray to help transport things around the house.

The most important part of owning a walker is your constant use of it. If it is too heavy, too cumbersome, or too wide, you need another option. It should feel like a natural extension of you. It is there to support you, after all.

It's also important that you only use a walker that has been chosen and adjusted for you. If you borrow a walker from a friend or family member, it isn't sized or adjusted for you, so you risk injury. An occupational therapist, physical therapist, or physical medicine and rehabilitation provider can offer the best training in walker use.

Choosing the right walker, having the walker adjusted properly for you, following safety precautions with every move you make, and keeping your path clear of throw rugs, cords, and clutter are all essential for safe walker use. Always be mindful of those things that assure safe walker use.

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