

**CRUTCH WALKING**

**PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET**

**What do I need to know about crutches?**

Crutches are used to help you walk or to improve balance after injury or surgery to your foot, hip, or leg. Your caregiver will fit you with your new crutches and show you the proper way to use crutches. One important point to remember when using crutches is to put your weight on your arms and hands and to avoid putting weight on your underarms (or armpits). Weight in the armpit area could cause nerve injury. When crutches fit and are used properly, you should be able to stand straight without your armpits resting on top of the crutches. Your handgrips should be placed to allow a slight bend in at the elbow at approximately 15 degrees. Two fingers should fit between your armpit and the top of the crutch.

Use your crutches only on firm ground. Make sure the rubber tips of your crutches are not split or loose. **DO NOT place any weight on the weaker leg**, unless your physician says that this is safe. Be careful of the following:

- Ice, snow or any slippery or unsteady surface under your crutch tips
- Wet or waxed floors and smooth cement floors
- Small rugs (especially on waxed floors)
- Telephone and other extension cords
- Crowded places
- Pets or small children

**What is the proper way to use crutches?**

**Walking:**

1. Place both crutches a few inches in front of you at the same time. (They should be about 1 inch in front of your toes and 6 to 8 inches to the side of your toes).
2. Move the weaker leg forward a few inches.
3. If you are “non-weight bearing”, hold the weaker leg up a few inches off the ground.
4. Push down on the handgrips and lift the stronger leg forward.

**Going Up Stairs:**

1. Face the stairs. Place both crutches in one hand and your other hand on the hand railing.
2. Place your weight on both hands and lift your stronger leg up to the next step.
3. Move crutches and your weaker leg up to the same step. Move your hand up the railing.
4. Repeat steps 2-3 until you are at the top of the stairs.

## **What is the proper way to use crutches (continued)?**

### **Going Down Stairs:**

1. Stand with the toes of your uninjured leg close to the edge of the step.
2. Place both crutches in one hand and your other hand on the railing.
3. Move the crutches and weaker leg down to the same step.
4. Bring your stronger leg down to the same step. Move your hand down the hand railing.
5. Repeat steps 3-4 until you are at the bottom of the stairs.

### **Getting In A Bed or Chair:**

1. Turn and backup to the bed or chair until you feel the edge of it against the back of your stronger leg. Keep your injured leg forward.
2. Take your crutches out from under your arms and place in the hand on the same side as the weaker leg. Reach back for the bed or chair with your other hand for safe sitting.
3. Slowly sit down while bending your uninjured knee and pushing yourself back into the chair or bed.

### **Getting Up From A Chair:**

1. Sit on the edge of your chair. Put your uninjured foot close to the chair.
2. Place both crutches in the hand on the same side as the weaker leg.
3. Move your stronger leg back until it touches the bed or chair.
4. Push up with your hands using the crutches or arms of the chair. Put your weight on your uninjured foot as you get up.
5. Move one crutch to the other side.

## **What do I need to report to my physician?**

Call your physician's office if you have questions about how to use your crutches or for the following:

- You have questions about how to use your crutches.
- Your crutches do not fit.
- Your crutches break or get lost.
- You have numbness in a hand or arm.

*Reference: MICROMEDEX(R) Healthcare Series Vol. 111 3/2002.*

*For more Patient Education Facts Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at [www.greenhosp.org](http://www.greenhosp.org) and click on Patient & Visitors , then Patient Education*

*Rev. 7/04*