A Guide to Selecting a Walking Frame

Three or four-wheeled walking frames

Are designed for people who can walk reasonably well but who would benefit from extra support over longer distances. Three-wheeled walkers are easy to manoeuvre but are less stable than four-wheeled models (which have a larger base of support). Wheeled walking frames are generally designed for both indoor and outdoor use and feature either bicycle-style hand brakes or push down brakes.

Bicycle-style hand brakes feature levers that can be squeezed upwards to brake temporarily, or pushed down to lock into place.

Push down brakes work by pushing down through the handles which engages a spring-loaded rubber stopper, (located between the twin castor rear wheels), to contact the ground. When weight is removed from the handles the brakes will release. It is important to practice operating the brakes before selecting a walker to ensure your safety.

Most styles of walkers fold for storage or transportation.

Two-wheeled walking frames

Are generally recommended for users who can stand with light support but require additional support when walking, they are most suited to indoor use and shorter distances. They feature two small castors at the front, and rubber stoppers (also known as ferrules) or glides (also known as skis) at the rear. Some models have wheels that swivel which can provide better manoeuvrability but may be less stable. Stoppers offer greater stability than glides; however, glides are easier to push over some floor surfaces.

When using two-wheeled frames it is important to stand upright, holding the frame with both hands and using a natural walking pattern. Slide the frame forwards a small distance, step forward with one leg whilst placing body weight through the frame, and then bring the other leg past the first.

Height is adjusted to the correct position by pushing in the pin and sliding to height required.
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The Independent Living Centre provides an impartial information and advisory service to help you choose the right product for you.

Static Walkers

Also known as pick-up or Zimmer, these walking frames’ have four rubber stoppers (no wheels). They are generally recommended for users who require even more assistance and support when standing and walking and are designed for short distances.

When using the frames, stand upright holding the frame with both hands. Lift the frame forwards a small distance and put it down with all four tips firmly on the ground. Step forward with one leg whilst placing body weight through the frame and then bring the other leg alongside.

Avoid stepping too far forward to prevent over-balancing. A sufficient level of strength and balance is required to use the walkers safely.

Key Points (or) Factors to Consider

Consider the environments where the walking frame will be used.
Remove indoor and outdoor obstacles such as floor mats, power cords, and water hoses. Check that the mobility aid will fit through doorways and has sufficient circulation space. Take extra care in wet areas and on uneven ground. Is a ramp required if steps are too hard to manage?

When standing up from a seated position, remember to push up from the arms or seat of the chair. Before grasping the walking aid ensure lockable brakes are engaged properly when standing up and sitting down.

Check rubber tips, and brake cables regularly for signs of wear and rust. Make sure all handle height adjustment fastenings are secured tightly.

Consider the overall weight of the walking frame. Aluminium is lighter than steel. Check if it is easy to fold and lift the walking frame. Check that it will fit into the boot of a car or that it can be used safely when using public transport.

Consider the load capacity (weight limit) of the device. Is it appropriate?

Selecting and Adjusting a Four Wheeled Walker

Choosing a four wheeled walker

Choosing a walker can be difficult as there are so many different types available. Booking an appointment at the ILC can assist with narrowing down the options by getting advice from a health professional. We also advise that you see your Physiotherapist to assess whether a walker is the right option for you.

Four wheeled walkers are generally designed for both indoor and outdoor use; however it is worth considering whether having larger wheels might make it easier to manage if you want to use it outdoors for the majority of the time.
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Things to look for when choosing a walker

- Brakes
- Height of handles
- Height of seat
- Backrest
- Size
- Transportation

How to adjust the walker to suit you

When adjusting the height of a walker it is important to wear everyday shoes and stand in a natural position with hands resting comfortably to the sides of the body.

Adjust the height of the handles by unscrewing the large wingnut on the side at the base of the handle. Once you have removed the wingnut you will be able to slide the handle up or down. Set it so that the walking frame handgrips sit approximately at wrist crease height.

Wheeled walkers often come with a seat that is fixed in height so it is important to check that this is appropriate before making a purchase. When sitting on the seat in a comfortable position, feet should be resting flat on the ground and your hip should be above your knee to make it easier to stand following a rest.

When using wheeled walkers it is important to stay within the base of support, with the frame held at a comfortable position in front of the body. This position should allow a 15 to 30 degree bend at the elbow and facilitate standing in an upright position. When turning corners it is important not to spin directly on the spot, but to walk in a wider turning circle.

Accessories

Many walkers have optional accessories such as baskets or bags, trays and oxygen bottle holders. It is important not to overload a walking frame with too much additional weight because this may affect its balance.

Walkers may also come with a backrest which can be removable or able to flip up when folded. Some are curved, straight or have more padding. It is worth finding one that feels comfortable for a short period of sitting.

Walkers come in different sizes

Some walkers are specifically designed for petite people with a lower seat; lower handle height and smaller overall width and depth.

Some walkers are larger with a higher load capacity and seat width for those that need the extra room when seated or higher handle height to allow for those who are tall.

Most styles of walkers fold for storage or transportation, however it is always worth trying to fold and put in the car to make sure it will fit in your car and that you can manage lifting it in and out.

At the ILC we have a range of four wheeled walkers that you can trial during an appointment.

Further information:

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