

# INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING CRUTCHES



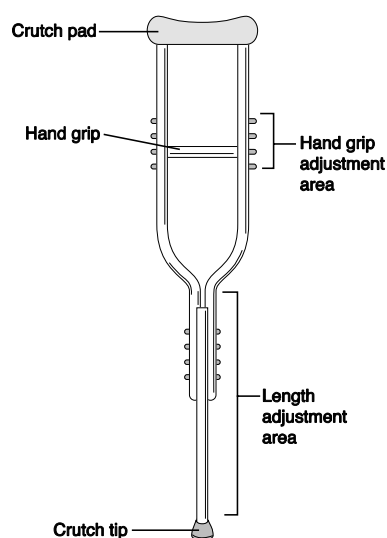
American College of  
Foot and Ankle Surgeons

It takes some coordination to get around on crutches. To make sure you use your crutches correctly, please read these instructions and follow them carefully.

## Sizing Your Crutches

Even if you've already been fitted for crutches, make sure your crutch pads and handgrips are set at the proper distance, as follows:

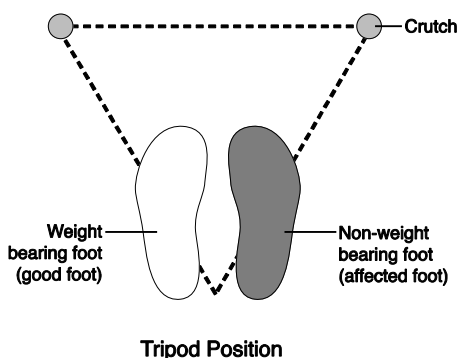
- **Crutch pad distance from armpits:** The crutch pads (tops of crutches) should be 1½" to 2" (about two finger widths) below the armpits, with the shoulders relaxed.
- **Handgrip:** Place it so your elbow is flexed about 15 to 30 degrees—enough so you can fully extend your elbow when you take a step.
- **Crutch length (top to bottom):** The total crutch length should equal the distance from your armpit to about 6" in front of a shoe.



## Begin in the "Tripod Position"

The tripod position is the position you stand in when using crutches. It is also the position you begin walking in.

To get into the tripod position, place the crutch tips about 4" to 6" to the side and in front of each foot. Stand on your "good" foot (the one that is weight-bearing).



## Walking with Crutches

### *(Non-weight-bearing)*

If your podiatric foot and ankle surgeon has told you to avoid ALL weight-bearing, it is important to follow these instructions carefully. You will need sufficient upper body strength to support all your weight with just your arms and shoulders.

1. Begin in the tripod position—and remember, keep all your weight on your "good" (weight-bearing) foot.
2. Advance both crutches and the affected foot/leg.

3. Move the "good" weight-bearing foot/leg forward (beyond the crutches).
4. Advance both crutches, and then the affected foot/leg.
5. Repeat steps #3 and #4.

## Managing Chairs with Crutches

To get into and out of a chair safely:

1. Make sure the chair is stable and will not roll or slide—and it must have arms and back support.
2. Stand with the backs of your legs touching the front of the seat.
3. Place both crutches in one hand, grasping them by the handgrips.
4. Hold on to the crutches (on one side) and the chair arm (on the other side) for balance and stability while lowering yourself to a seated position—or raising yourself from the chair if you're getting up.

## Managing Stairs without Crutches

The safest way to go up and down stairs is to use your seat—not your crutches.

### **To go up stairs:**

1. Seat yourself on a low step.
2. Move your crutches upstairs by one of these methods:
  - If distance and reach allow, place the crutches at the top of the staircase.

- If this isn't possible, place crutches as far up the stairs as you can—then move them to the top as you progress up the stairs.
3. In the seated position, reach behind you with both arms.
  4. Use your arms and weight-bearing foot/leg to lift yourself up one step.
  5. Repeat this process one step at a time. (Remember to move the crutches to the top of the staircase if you haven't already done so.)
3. In the seated position, reach behind you with both arms.
  4. Use your arms and weight-bearing foot/leg to lift yourself down one step.
  5. Repeat this process one step at a time. (Remember to move the crutches to the bottom of the staircase if you haven't already done so.) ▲

**To go down stairs:**

1. Seat yourself on the top step.
2. Move your crutches downstairs by sliding them to the lowest possible point on the stairway—then continue to move them down as you progress down the stairs.

**IMPORTANT!**

*Follow These Rules for Safety and Comfort*

- **Don't** look down. Look straight ahead as you normally do when you walk.
- **Don't** use crutches if you feel dizzy or drowsy.
- **Don't** walk on slippery surfaces. Avoid snowy, icy, or rainy conditions.
- **Don't** put *any* weight on your foot if your doctor has so advised.
- **Do** make sure your crutches have rubber tips.
- **Do** wear well-fitting, low-heel shoes (or shoe).
- **Do** position the crutch hand grips correctly (see "Sizing Your Crutches")
- **Do** keep the crutch pads 1½" to 2" below your armpits.
- **Do** call your podiatric foot and ankle surgeon if you have any questions or difficulties.

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**American College of  
 Foot and Ankle Surgeons**

This information has been prepared by the Consumer Education Committee of the American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons, a professional society of 5,700 podiatric foot and ankle surgeons. Members of the College are Doctors of Podiatric Medicine who have received additional training through surgical residency programs.

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