

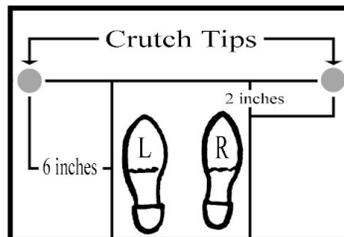
Using Crutches

It is important to know how to use and adjust crutches to avoid problems caused by improper use. Besides causing fatigue and frustration, ill-fitting crutches can cause axillary (armpit) nerve damage.

ADJUSTMENT:

With feet and crutches in the position shown, the tops of the crutches should be two finger-widths below your armpits. With wrists straight and elbows bent at 25 to 30 degrees, the weight should be on your palms on the handgrips. You should wear well-fitting, low-heeled shoes with non-slip soles.

Support your weight on the handgrips, with your elbows nearly straight. Squeeze the axillary pad between your upper arms and ribcage; you will get better support and balance, and tire less quickly. Do not rest your weight on the axillary pads. The pressure on nerves and blood vessels in the armpits can cause "crutch palsy," numbness in the hands and arms, which is usually temporary.



PROPER USE:

THREE POINT GAIT is used when one leg is weak or cannot be used at all (no weight on injured leg). The first step is to move your crutches and injured leg 12 to 15 inches ahead of the good leg. Then swing your good leg 12 to 15 inches ahead of the crutches. Repeat. Walking on crutches is easier if you move your injured leg in rhythm with your crutches.

STAIRS:

To go **UP** stairs, support your weight on the handgrips while you move your good leg up one step. Put your body weight on your good leg while you move the crutches and injured leg up the same step.

To go **DOWN** stairs, the order is reversed: your crutches and injured leg move first. Place the crutches at the back of the lower step. With your weight is on the handgrips, move the good leg to the same step. Do **NOT** put the crutches or foot at the front edge of the step because you could lose your balance and fall.

If the stairway has a handrail, use the rail instead of one of the crutches, for better support. The sequence for going up or down stairs is the same; just put the weight you would put on one of the crutches on the handrail instead. Carry the unused crutch perpendicular to the crutch you are using, or hold both crutches upright and use them as one.

Remember, with stairs and curbs: "The good goes up, the bad goes down."