

Elbow crutches

Information and advice for patients

Physiotherapy

What are elbow crutches?

Elbow crutches are mobility aids designed to take weight off your lower limbs by increasing the weight you put through your upper limbs. Your physiotherapist or nurse will tell you how to use your elbow crutches. You will be advised to use them in one of the following ways which will be explained to you:

- **Full weight-bearing** (you can put weight through your legs as normal)
- **Partial weight-bearing** (you can put some weight through your affected leg)
- **Non weight-bearing** (you are not allowed to put any weight through your affected leg)

After you have been discharged from hospital you will have appointments at the fracture clinic and your doctor can refer you for further physiotherapy if you need it.

It is important that you use your elbow crutches as instructed and walk in the style you have been taught until your doctor or physiotherapist tells you that you can stop using them.

What is the benefit of elbow crutches?

The elbow crutches will give you the support you need to get back to normal walking, or help you with balance.

What are the risks of using elbow crutches?

If you are full weight-bearing there are no risks.

If you are partial or non-weight bearing you will be putting extra pressure/weight through your arms which could result in hand, arm or shoulder pain.

What are the risks of not using elbow crutches?

If you are full weight-bearing and have been advised to use the crutches because you have a problem with your balance, not using the crutches could result in you having a fall.

If you are partial or non weight-bearing, not using the crutches can mean you put too much weight through your affected leg. This could result in your leg being damaged.

Are there any alternatives to using elbow crutches?

There are other mobility aids (such as walking frames) available that can give the same benefits, but these are less versatile to use as they cannot be used on the stairs or in other settings.

Looking after your elbow crutches

- It is your responsibility to look after your crutches.
- DO NOT alter the height of your crutches.
- Regularly check the ferrules (the rubber bits on the bottom of your crutches). If you notice that they are very worn away then they need replacing. You can get new ferrules at large chemists or from the hospital physiotherapy department.
- You can return them to the fracture clinic when you have been told you no longer need to use them.

Exercises while using crutches

Whilst you are using your crutches you should perform the following exercises:

Ankle exercises

1. Bring your toes and ankles up towards you.
2. Point them away.

Repeat this 10 times, 2 or 3 times a day.



Straight leg

1. Sit on a bed with your leg out straight in front of you.
2. Push your knee down into the bed and tighten your thigh muscles.
3. Hold for 5 seconds.

Repeat this 10 times, 2 or 3 times a day.



Knee bend

1. Sit on a chair.
2. Bend your knee back as far as possible.
3. Hold for 5 seconds.

Repeat this 10 times, 2 or 3 times a day.



What are the benefits of the exercises?

The benefit of these exercises is that they will help you maintain movement at your hip, knee and ankle joint and will help keep your thigh muscles strong while you are using the crutches.

What are the risks of performing the exercises?

You may experience slight discomfort during or after performing the exercises. This is the same as you would when doing any exercise.

What are the risks of not performing the exercises?

If you do not perform these exercises you may lose some strength and movement in your lower limbs, which may cause you to have problems with walking.

Are there any alternatives?

There may be other exercises that can be suitable for you to perform; your physiotherapist can give you advice about these.

Using the stairs with your elbow crutches

If you need to use the stairs at home you may be taught how to go up and down the stairs by a physiotherapist before you are discharged from hospital.

Full and partial weight bearing style of walking

Going up stairs

1. Step up with your non-affected leg while leaving your crutches on the step below.
2. Step up with your affected leg and bring the crutches up with you.

Going down stairs

1. Place your crutches on the step below.
2. Step down with your affected leg.
3. Step down with your non-affected leg.

Non weight bearing style of walking

Going up stairs

1. Push down through your crutches.
2. Hop up to the next step on your good leg, keeping your affected leg off the ground.
3. Bring your crutches up to the same step.

Going down stairs

1. Place your crutches on the step below.
2. Hop down on your non-affected leg, keeping your affected leg off the ground.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your condition or using your crutches you can contact:

- the ward you were discharged from

Further information

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our website www.swbh.nhs.uk, follow us on X @SWBHnhs and like us on Facebook www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs.

Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- Disabled Living Foundation (2013) *Choosing walking equipment*. Available at: <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/11286593/choosing-walking-equipment-disabled-living-foundation> [Accessed 7th September 2023]
- Faruqi SR, Jaebon T. (2010) Ambulatory assistive devices in orthopaedics: uses and modifications., *The Journal of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons*, 18 (1), pp. 41-50.
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