

## OrthoBethesda Therapy Services

### Getting Around Safely With Your Crutches

*(Weight Bearing As Tolerated)*

Your physician will decide whether you are to be non weight bearing, toe-touch weight bearing, partial weight bearing, or weight bearing as tolerated on your surgical/injured leg. These instructions are specifically for patients that are **weight bearing as tolerated (WBAT)**. It is important that place as much weight on the surgical/injured leg as tolerable, to prevent muscles in that leg from weakening. The therapist will instruct you on the appropriate set-up and fitting of your crutches.

**Weight Bearing As Tolerated (WBAT)**: There is no limitation on the amount of weight you can place through the surgical/injured leg. You may place as much weight through the leg as tolerated, to your comfort. Placing weight through the leg is important for preventing the leg muscles from weakening.

#### Set Up and Fitting:

- Standing straight with your arm at your side, the crutch handle should align with the inside of your wrist.
- The height of the crutch should be adjusted so that there are 1-2 inches of space between the top of the crutch and your armpit.
  - This is roughly the width of two fingers.



## General Instructions and Tips:

- Use your crutches only as instructed.
- Use your crutches for all walking and standing activities until your physician instructs you otherwise.
- Your weight should be placed through your hands by pushing down through the crutch handles.
- Never lean on your crutches.
  - *Resting your armpits on the crutches may cause nerve damage!*
- Always use both crutches. Using only one crutch may cause back problems.
- Place weight evenly on both crutches.
- Walk slowly and carefully.
- Have someone walk with you initially until you feel steady on your feet.
  - This is especially important when walking on unlevel/uneven surfaces or stairs.
- Remove loose rugs or other small objects from the floor in order to minimize the risk of tripping.
- Wear appropriately-fitted, low-heeled shoes. Do not wear slippers or high heels.
- Do not wear long, floor-length robes or gowns while using crutches.
- Avoid slippery and/or wet floors.
- Check the ground for objects that may cause crutches to slip out from under you.
- Check the crutches daily for cracks and/or loose screws. Replace worn tips and unsafe parts.
- When not in use, it is best to rest your crutches upside down. They are less likely to fall over this way.



## Walking:

### Option 1: (fastest, least support)

1. Start with the crutches positioned 1-2 inches to the outside of each foot.
2. Advance one leg and the opposite crutch 6-12 inches in front of you (e.g. *right* crutch, *left* leg).
3. Repeat the previous step with the remaining leg and crutch.



Option 2: (slower, more support)

1. Start by placing both crutches 1-2 inches to the outside of each foot and 6-12 inches in front of you.
2. Step your surgical/injured leg forward to meet the crutches.
3. Step your non-surgical/non-injured leg forward, in front of your surgical/injured leg and crutches.



You may combine the first two steps if you feel comfortable: Advance your non-surgical/non-injured leg and both crutches forward at the same time.



Option 3: (slowest, most support)

1. Start by placing both crutches 1-2 inches to the outside of each foot and 6-12 inches in front of you.
2. Step your surgical/injured leg forward to meet the crutches.
3. Step your non-surgical/non-injured leg forward to meet the crutches and surgical/injured leg.



You may combine the first two steps if you feel comfortable: Advance your non-surgical/non-injured leg and both crutches forward at the same time.



## Standing Up:

1. Scoot forward in the chair to make it easier to stand.
2. Hold both crutches in one hand, on the side of your surgical/injured leg.
3. Place both feet flat on the ground and place your free hand on the armrest (or seat) of the chair.
4. Lean forward at your hips, tighten your core muscles and then push down through both hands and both legs in order to stand.
5. Once standing and steady, place one crutch under each arm.



## Sitting Down:

1. Position yourself so that the backs of your legs are touching the chair.
2. Hold both crutches in one hand, on the side of your surgical/injured leg.
3. Reach back with your free hand until you feel the armrest (or seat) of the chair.
4. Slowly lower yourself into the chair.



## Going Up Steps/Curbs:

1. Stand close to the surface you intend to go up.
2. Step up with your non-surgical/non-injured leg.
3. Step up with your surgical/injured leg and both crutches.
4. If going up multiple steps, repeat this pattern until you have reached the top.



\*If there is a railing available to use, hold both crutches on the side of your body opposite the handrail and grab the handrail with your free hand. Step up with your non-surgical/non-injured leg, then bring your surgical/injured leg and both crutches up at the same time.



## Going Down Steps/Curbs:

1. Stand close to the edge of the surface you intend to go down.
2. Lower both crutches down to the step below.
3. Bring down your surgical/injured leg first, followed by your non-surgical/non-injured leg.
4. If going down multiple steps, repeat this pattern until you have reached the bottom.



\*If there is a railing available to use, hold both crutches on the side of your body opposite the handrail and grab the handrail with your free hand. Lower the crutches down, step down with your surgical/injured leg, then step down with your non-surgical/non-injured leg.

