

How to Fit Crutches

Three Methods: [Fitting Underarm \(Axilla\) Crutches](#) [Fitting Forearm \(Lofstrand\) Crutches](#) [Crutch Safety Tips and Walking Information](#)

Leg injuries often result in patients being given crutches. If you've never used crutches, fitting them can seem counterintuitive. In order to give your injury the best chance to recover and increase your mobility, it's important to do it correctly.

Method
1

Fitting Underarm (*Axilla*) Crutches

- 1 Put on a pair of everyday shoes.** Your shoes should have low heels and good support. In fitting, try to use the same shoes you'd ordinarily use walking around, or ones you anticipate using with crutches.
- 2 Relax your arms and let them hang down over the crutches.**
- 3 Adjust the crutches so that at least 2–4 inches (5.1–10.2 cm) separate armpit and crutch pad.** This is where many people get things wrong, thinking that the crutch pad should sit right *beneath* the armpit. In fact, there should be enough space so that the crutch pad doesn't touch the armpit unless the user leans down slightly. Crutches are designed to get support from the arms and ribcage, not from the shoulders.
 - If your crutches don't have notches to perfectly accommodate the two inch gap between armpit and pad, opt for the lower setting instead of the higher setting. Higher-set crutches may have a higher likelihood of dislocating the shoulder. This will also stop you from leaning on your crutches when you don't have to.
- 4 Adjust the crutches further to accommodate the hand grips.** With your hands hanging relaxed at your sides and standing upright, the crutches' handgrips should be level with your wrist crease.
- 5 Make any final accommodations for comfort.** Crutches are meant to deliver additional support to ailing legs and, as such, can be used more or less properly. Accommodations, however, may be made in order to help the subject feel comfortable.

Method
2

Fitting Forearm (*Lofstrand*) Crutches

- 1 Put on a pair of everyday shoes.** Go with shoes you'll likely have on when you use the crutches.
- 2 Stand up as straight as possible and let your arms fall down to your sides, relaxed.**
- 3 Take the forearm crutch and fit the hand grip so that it falls in line with your wrist joint.** Correctly fitted, the wrist grip should line up roughly with where you usually wear a watch.
- 4 Fit the arm cuff mid-way up your forearm.** The half-circle or V-shaped cuff should sit halfway between your wrist and elbow. They shouldn't push your shoulders up when holding or make you hunch over.
 - This sizing is important because you'll want a 15 - 30 degree bend in your arms when using the crutches. Sizing correctly will give your arms and shoulders their full range of motion, allowing you to consistently plant the crutches at 30 degree angles.

Method
3

Crutch Safety Tips and Walking Information

1 Choose between an underarm and forearm crutch, if necessary. In most injury or assistance situations, your doctor or physical therapist will give you a pair of crutches and explain how to use them. In the unlikely case that you get to choose which kind of crutches you want to use, here's a breakdown of what each crutch is good at and not so good at.

- Underarm crutches:
 - Usually for temporary use involving injury
 - Less upper-body mobility, but more overall mobility
 - More difficult to use and may involve risk of nerve damage in the axilla (underarm)
- Forearm crutches:
 - Usually for long-term use involving ongoing leg weakness^[1]
 - Offers more upper-body mobility than underarm crutches
 - Allows patients use of forearms without setting crutches down

2 Learn how to walk with crutches. Plant your crutches 6 to 12 inches (15.2 to 30.5 cm) in front of you, squeezing on your ribs and upper arms. Pushing down on the hand grips and *not* on your underarms, take a step with your weaker leg. Follow with your stronger leg. Repeat.

3 Learn how to stand up with crutches. Hold both crutches by the hand grips in one hand while pushing up with the other hand on the chair. Put one crutch under each arm and proceed as normal.

4 Learn how to sit down with crutches. Place both crutches in one hand holding the hand grips together and reach for the chair with your other hand to lower yourself down slowly. This is essentially reversing the process of standing up.

5 Get comfortable going up and down stairs. Whenever possible, use a handrail when going up and down stairs. Place one crutch under one arm and use the handrail with the other arm for support.

- Going up stairs: step up with the stronger leg, then the sore leg, and lastly bring up the crutch.
- Going down stairs: lower crutch down to the step, move your sore leg down and then bring your stronger leg down. Make sure the crutch tip is completely on the stair

6 Cushion the crutch pad to make it more comfortable and reduce the possibility of nerve damage. Take an old sweatshirt or even a memory foam pad and fit it above the crutch pad for a little extra cushion. Even with extra padding, medical professionals advise against leaning on the crutch pads with your underarms.

Sources and Citations

1. <http://www.fpnotebook.com/sports/pharm/Crtchs.htm>