

PTs say proper fit and use of walking aids can prevent fall-related injuries in elderly

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The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) is urging elderly adults who use canes and walkers as walking aids to be properly assessed and fitted by a physical therapist to avoid fall-related injuries. This advice comes in response to a study published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* (June 2009), which found that 47,000 senior citizens end up in emergency rooms each year due to falls from improper use and fit of walkers and canes.

The study, conducted by government researchers, examined six years of emergency room records and found that the [walker](#) was associated seven times more with injury-related falls than was the cane. [Physical therapists](#) advise that these results indicate a strong need for proper fit and assessment.

According to physical therapist and APTA member Cathy Ciolek, PT, DPT, GCS, many patients often borrow walking aids from friends and family, which can result in injuries. "We see many patients use borrowed canes, walkers, and crutches without adjusting the fit and height appropriately, which can cause discomfort and result in further injury," she said.

In addition to providing a proper fit, your physical therapist can assess your individual needs to ensure you are using the proper walking aid and that it is in proper working condition. "In some instances a cane may not be the safest option, and it would be best to use a walker. Your physical therapist can help make that decision," says Ciolek. She provides some

general tips for those using a cane or walker as a walking aid:

- The walker or cane should be about the height of your wrists when your arms are at your sides.
- When using a walker, your arms should be slightly bent when holding on, but you shouldn't have to bend forward at the waist to reach it.
- Periodically check the rubber tips at the bottom of the cane or walker. Be sure to replace them if they are uneven or worn through.

As experts in restoring motion and mobility in people's lives, physical therapists work collaboratively with physicians to ensure safe recoveries from illness or injury. Ciolek recommends seeing a physical therapist for an assessment and proper fit or asking for a referral to a physical therapist from your physician. Visit www.moveforwardpt.com to find a physical therapist near you.

Source: American [Physical Therapy](#) Association ([news](#) : [web](#))

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