Ambulatory Aids
Walkers, canes and crutches are intended to help an individual remain mobile by providing assistance in walking. These devices transfer some of the function normally performed by the legs and feet to the arms and hands. The most important of these functions is usually weight bearing, but others include balance as well as standing or walking stability. It is important to adjust to the proper height before using the device.

Height Adjustment
The height of the handgrip(s) should be such that it provides a slight bend in the elbow when you are standing straight and holding the handgrip(s). A 20-30 degree bend in the elbow is usually considered desirable. This can easily be achieved if you can safely stand for a few moments, look straight ahead with your shoulders squared and your arms hanging relaxed at your sides. While you maintain this position, a family member or friend should adjust the leg height of the device so that the handgrip(s) is slightly above the wrist. After making the height adjustment, check to insure that all legs are locked in the selected position. **Do not attempt to stand if you cannot do so safely.**

If you are using an ambulatory aid for the first time, it is advisable to have someone present who can provide assistance until you become familiar with its use.

**Always take short steps.** Overstriding tends to cause loss of balance.

**Prevent falls**
- Make sure any loose rugs, rug corners that stick up, or cords are secured to the ground so you do not trip or get tangled in them.
- Remove clutter and keep your floors clean and dry.
- Wear shoes or slippers with rubber or other non-skid soles. Do NOT wear shoes with heels or leather soles.
- Arrange furniture for free walking space
- Install railings in hallways and grab bars in bathrooms
- Maintain adequate lighting, replace light bulbs as needed
- Install non slip strips or rubber mats in tub or shower
- Use caution when carrying items
- Keep frequently used items in easy to reach places
Using Your Ambulatory Aid Correctly

Cane Basics
- Hold the cane on the stronger side
- Make sure your cane has been adjusted to your height
- Your elbow should be slightly bent when you hold the handle.
- Choose a cane with a comfortable handle.
- Look forward when you walk, not down at your feet.
- If using a four pronged cane be sure to place all four prongs on the ground before you put your weight on your cane.
- Use a chair with armrests when you can to make sitting and standing easier.
- Check the tip(s) on your cane daily and replace them if they are worn.
- **Always take short steps.** Over striding tends to cause loss of balance.

Walker Basics
- If your walker has wheels, you will push it forward to move forward. If you walker does not have wheels, then you will need to lift it and place it in front of you to move forward.
- All 4 tips or wheels on your walker need to be on the ground before you put your weight on it.
- Make sure your walker has been adjusted to your height.
- Look forward when you are walking, not down at your feet.
- **DO NOT** push or place the walker too far in front of you. Keep the walker’s back legs even with your toes.
- Always keep all or part of your body inside the frame of the walker
- **DO NOT** lean on your walker.
- Use a chair with armrests to make sitting and standing easier. Lean slightly forward and use your arms to help you stand up. **Do NOT** pull on or tilt the walker to help you stand up.
- Before starting to walk, stand until you feel steady and are ready to move forward.
- When walking, start with your weaker leg. If you had surgery, this is the leg you had surgery on.
- **Always take short steps.** Over striding tends to cause loss of balance.
- When going up a step or curb, start with your stronger leg. When going down a step or curb, start with the weaker leg: "Up with the good, down with the bad."
- Keep space between you and your walker, and keep your toes inside your walker. Stepping too close to the front or tips or wheels may make you lose your balance.
- Attach a small bag or basket to your walker to hold small items so that you can keep both hands on your walker.
- **DO NOT** try to use stairs and escalators unless a physical therapist has trained you how to use them with your walker.
- If your walker is a folding model, ensure that the folding mechanism is locked securely.
- Check the tip(s) on your walker daily and replace them if they are worn.

If your physician’s or therapist’s instructions differ in any way from those given here, follow their instructions explicitly. If you are uncomfortable with the use of your device, feel unsafe or have never been instructed in the use of your ambulatory aid discuss with your case manager or contact Meridian At Home.

References: