

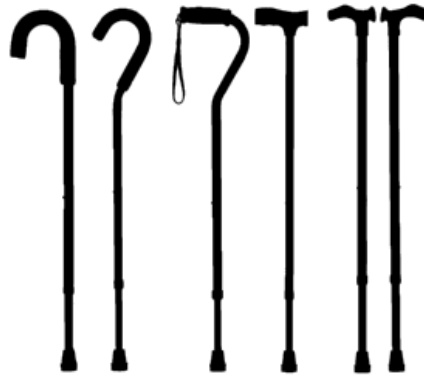
How do I choose the right walking device for me? -Tina Chen P.T.

With all the different equipment choices out there, it can become very confusing and frustrating to know which walking device is the right one for you. Unfortunately, this can be a complicated question that may be best answered by a doctor, therapist, or equipment specialist that can examine your current functional mobility. However, here are some general guidelines that may be helpful if you are choosing a device for yourself or for your loved one.

First, Let's review the different general walking devices:

➤ **Single Point Cane**

- Different hand grips (even for arthritic hands!)
- Various colors and styles (including folding)



➤ **Quad Cane**

- Small base or large base
- Various colors and styles



➤ **Front Wheel Walker**

- 3in wheels / 5in wheels
- Swivel wheels optional
- Barriatric (heavy duty) size available
- Accessories
 - Tray, Basket



➤ Rollator Walker

- 2 wheel
- 3 wheel
- 4 wheel
- With hand brakes (similar to bicycle brakes) or with push down brakes
- Heavy duty, Tall, and Junior sizes available



Factors to consider:

- **BALANCE:** Most likely balance is an issue if you are looking at buying a walking device. The question is, How Much?
 - Are you furniture walking? Even though you walking without a device you are holding on to anything and everything around to keep your balance.
 - Have you fallen lately? - Do you feel fearful of leaving the house because you might fall outside or you might not have the energy to get back home?
 - Do you fall forward of shuffle your feet when you walk?
- **STRENGTH:**
 - Do you "plop" when you sit? Difficulty controlling your leg strength when sitting down in to a chair (especially a low seat or couch) so you end up falling back into the chair.
 - Do you feel decreased strength in the muscles of your legs, and is it one sided (right or left)? Or have pain in one or both legs (consistent or intermittent)?
- **SENSATION:**
 - Do you have occasional or constant numbness, tingling, or decreased feeling/ sensitivity in your legs?
- **FLEXIBILITY:**
 - Do you have decreased range of motion at your toes, ankles, knees, or hips? You have lost flexibility at any joint in your legs?

If you've answered "**YES**" to any of these questions, it might be wise to consider having a walking device. This can be a minimal as a folding can that you put in your bag or purse 'just in case' you need it. Remember, falls are one of the

leading causes of disability and death in older persons with fractures resulting in 3-5% of falls.¹

If you are interested in buying a walking device, here are some general requirements or guidelines to consider:

CANES / QUAD CANES:

- Are you using the cane properly? IS IT IN THE CORRECT HAND????
 - A cane goes in the opposite hand of side that is weak or painful. For example, if my right leg is weak, I would hold the cane in my left hand.
 - I know this seems counterintuitive, but when you put less weight on one of your legs (let's use the example of the Right side) i.e. limping on the right, your center of mass shifts to the left. This requires you to need extra support on the left side in order to walk normally.
 - Make sure the person using the cane is not tripping over it or the cane is bumping into objects because of poor handling or sequencing of the cane
 - PROPER USE OF THE CANE:
 - Going back to our original example, if the right leg is weaker, the cane (in the LEFT hand) should move forward WITH the right leg.

FRONT WHEEL WALKER:

- Is the walker set at the right height? With the arms hanging straight, the handle of the walker should be at the user's wrist (the elbow is at about a 15-20 degree angle)
- Are you standing in the walker correctly? Your body should not be too far into the walker, but it should not be way out in front either. Your body should be slightly back from the frame.

ROLLATOR:

- Since a rollator has 4 wheels you need to have fairly good balance to use the device properly. If you need to lean heavily onto the device, a rollator may not be the safest product for you (a front wheel walker would be better).
- Are you able to remember the proper sequence in which to set the brakes? For individuals that have trouble with memory or safety/judgment, the brakes of the rollator need to be properly set before sitting and when not in use. Otherwise, the walker can roll easily and may be dangerous for the patient when using the seat or for support when getting up.

- Do you have the hand strength on both sides to set and squeeze the brakes?

Below is a list of advantages and disadvantages for the various walking devices.

	Advantage	Disadvantage
Single point cane	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides minimal support and stability • Small & Compact • Lightweight 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not provide enough support
Quad Cane	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides minimal > moderate support and stability on one side • Lightweight 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be cumbersome and difficult on stairs
Front Wheel Walker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides moderate support • Basket or tray available as accessory device • Available in Larger or Taller size 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be cumbersome on uneven surfaces and in community • Rubber tips wear out quickly • No seat for resting • Difficult on stairs
Rollator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 large wheels for easy maneuverability • Great for outdoor and community use • Seat always available for rest breaks • Basket included (for personal items or oxygen) • East-to-use hand brakes for safety • Ergonomic hand grips for comfort 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavier in weight (13.5 lbs) • Needs occasional brake maintenance • Difficult on stairs; may need caregiver to carry

If you think that this device may be right for you or a loved one, there are several medical equipment stores that you can try the rollator in the store or return them after a trial period. Please have supervision when testing the device for your safety. Also, feel free to e-mail me with any questions at tinachenpt@yahoo.com.

References:

1. <http://www.geriatricsandaging.ca/fmi/xsl/article.xsl?-lay=Article&-recid=417&-find=-find>)