GUIDE

What height should a cane be?

How to check your cane height in two minutes at home, the signs it is set wrong, and when no height adjustment will help.

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The short answer

When you stand upright with your arms hanging relaxed at your sides, the top of the cane should line up with the **crease on the inside of your wrist**. When you hold the handle, your elbow should have a slight, comfortable bend. Clinicians use this as the standard starting point, and it holds for most people and most canes.

Height charts that match a cane length to a person's overall height are only rough guides. Two people of the same height can have different arm lengths, posture and footwear, so measure the person, not the chart.

Why the height matters so much

A cane works by taking some weight off a painful or weaker leg and giving the body an extra point of contact with the ground. It only does that well at the right height.

- **Too tall:** the shoulder hunches up, the elbow bends too sharply, and the arm cannot push down with much force. People often feel this as aching in the shoulder or wrist.
- **Too short:** the person leans forward and sideways to reach the handle. That stooped posture can make balance worse, which defeats the purpose of using a cane.

An adjustment of a few holes on an adjustable cane can turn an awkward aid into one that feels natural. So check the height carefully at the start, and check it again over time.

How to measure, step by step

- Wear the shoes you walk in most days. A thick-soled walking shoe and a slipper can put the wrist at quite different heights.
- Stand as straight as is comfortable, on a hard, level floor, with arms relaxed.
- Have someone measure from the floor to the wrist crease on the side that will hold the cane. That number is your target cane height, measured from the tip to the top of the handle.
- Hold the cane in the hand **opposite** the weaker or painful leg, unless a clinician has advised otherwise. The cane and the weaker leg move forward together.
- Walk a few steps. The elbow should stay slightly bent, the shoulders level, and the back upright.

Adjustable or cut to length

Most metal canes adjust in steps with a push-button, which makes them forgiving if the first setting feels wrong. Wooden canes are usually cut to length from the bottom, with the rubber tip refitted afterward. Cutting is permanent, so confirm the measurement before anything is trimmed.

Handle shape matters too. A classic crook handle and an offset or shaped grip put the hand at slightly different points relative to the shaft. Judge the height by where the palm actually rests, not by the very top of the cane.

When the right cane will not fix the problem

A well-fitted cane is a good tool, but it addresses only part of how a person moves. If someone is leaning heavily on the cane with every step, catching their balance often, or still feeling unsteady with the height set correctly, a better cane will not solve it. Those are signs that they may need more support, such as a walker or rollator, or that something else is going on.

Unsteadiness can come from medication, changes in vision, foot pain, footwear, or loss of leg strength. None of those are fixed by a purchase. A physical therapist can assess walking and balance, recommend the right aid, and set its height properly. If a fall has already happened, that assessment matters more than any product choice.

Height is something you revisit

The right setting today may not be the right setting next year. Shoes change, posture changes, recovery from surgery progresses, and rubber tips wear down. Each of these shifts how the cane meets the hand. Seeing the cane as one part of an ongoing process, rather than a one-time purchase, helps keep it useful. That process is what we mean by Mobility Adaptation: changing how a person moves as their needs change, so they stay active, involved and independent.

A sensible routine is to recheck the height whenever footwear changes, after any illness or procedure that affects walking, and whenever the tip looks worn smooth.

What to measure and ask

- **Measure:** floor to wrist crease, standing upright, in everyday shoes, on the side that will hold the cane.
- **Check:** a slight elbow bend and level shoulders when holding the handle and walking a few steps.
- **Ask the seller:** what height range the cane adjusts across, in what size steps, and what weight it is rated for. Get these figures from the manufacturer's own specifications.
- **Ask about the tip:** whether replacement tips are available and what size fits.
- **Ask a clinician:** whether a cane is the right level of support, which hand to use, and whether a walking assessment would help.

General information, not medical advice. If fit, posture, pressure relief or fall risk is part of your decision, speak to an occupational therapist.

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