

# A Guide to Selecting a Walking Frame



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Assistive technology (AT) is a piece of equipment, device or system that provides people with practical solutions to everyday life activities. You can search our National Equipment Database [www.askned.com.au](http://www.askned.com.au) to view a range of products online.

This guide covers different types of walking frames and things to consider when selecting a walking frame.

## Three or four-wheeled walking frames

They are designed for people who can walk reasonably well but who would benefit from extra support over longer distances.

Three-wheeled walkers are easy to manoeuvre but are less stable than four-wheeled models (which have a larger base of support).

Wheeled walking frames are generally designed for both indoor and outdoor use. Larger wheels might make it easier to manage if you want to use it mostly outdoors. Most styles of walkers fold for storage or transportation.

## Two-wheeled walking frames

These are recommended for users who can stand with light support but require additional support when walking, they are most suited to indoor use and shorter distances.

They feature two small castors at the front, and rubber stoppers (also known as ferrules) or glides (also known as skis) at the rear. Some models have wheels that swivel, which can provide better manoeuvrability but may be less stable. Stoppers offer greater stability than glides. However, glides are easier to push over some floor surfaces.

## Static walkers

Also known as pick-up or Zimmer frames, these walking frames have four rubber stoppers (no wheels). They are generally recommended for users who require even more assistance and

support when standing and walking and are designed for short distances.



## Features

- Height of handles
- Height of seat
- Backrest
- Size
- Transportation

## Brakes

### Bicycle-style hand brakes

These brakes feature levers that can be squeezed upwards to brake temporarily or pushed down to lock into place.

### Push down brakes

These brakes work by pushing down through the handles which engages a spring-loaded rubber stopper, (located between the twin castor rear wheels), to contact the ground. When weight is removed from the handles the brakes will release.

It is important to practice operating the brakes before selecting a walker to ensure your safety.

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## Factors to Consider

### Environment

Remove indoor and outdoor obstacles such as floor mats, power cords, and water hoses. Check that the mobility aid will fit through doorways and has sufficient circulation space. Take extra care in wet areas and on uneven ground. Is a ramp required if steps are too hard to manage?

### Transfers

When standing up from a seated position, remember to push up from the arms or seat of the chair. Before grasping the walking aid ensure lockable brakes are engaged properly when standing up and sitting down.

### Maintenance

Check rubber tips and brake cables regularly for signs of wear and rust. Make sure all handle height adjustment fastenings are secured tightly.

### Overall weight of the walking frame

Aluminium is lighter than steel. Check if it is easy to fold and lift the walking frame. Check that it will fit into the boot of a car or that it can be used safely when using public transport.

Be aware that the lighter four-wheeled walking frames can feel less stable and tend to slide more on smooth surfaces such as tiles or wood, even when the brakes are locked. Consider trialling the walker before ordering.

### Accessories

Many walkers have optional accessories such as baskets or bags, trays and oxygen bottle holders. It is important not to overload a walking frame with too much additional weight because this may affect its balance.

Walkers may also come with a backrest which can be removable or able to flip up when folded. Some are curved, straight or have more padding. It is worth finding one that feels comfortable for a short period of sitting.

### Sizing

Walkers come in different sizes. Some walkers are specifically designed for petite people with a lower seat, lower handle height and smaller overall width and depth. Some walkers are larger with a higher load capacity and seat width for those that need the extra room when seated or higher handle height to allow for those who are tall.

Most styles of walkers fold for storage or transportation, however it is always worth trying to fold and put in the car to make sure it will fit in your car and that you can manage lifting it in and out.

## Adjusting a four wheeled walker

When adjusting the height of a walker it is important to wear everyday shoes and stand in a natural position with hands resting comfortably to the sides of the body.

Adjust the height of the handles by unscrewing the large wingnut on the side at the base of the handle. Once you have removed the wingnut you will be able to slide the handle up or down. Set it so that the walking frame handgrips sit approximately at wrist crease height. Wheeled walkers often come with a seat that is fixed in height, so it is important to check that this is appropriate before making a purchase.

When sitting on the seat in a comfortable position, feet should be resting flat on the ground and your hip should be above your knee to make it easier to stand following a rest. When walking, it is important to stay within the base of support, with the frame held at a comfortable position in front of the body.

This position should allow a 15 to 30-degree bend at the elbow and facilitate standing in an upright position. When turning corners, it is important not to spin directly on the spot, but to walk in a wider turning circle.

Choosing a walker can be difficult as there are so many different types available. We recommend speaking to a physiotherapist to assess whether a walker is the right option for you.