



# Student Health Center UNC Wilmington

## INSTRUCTION SHEET: USING CRUTCHES

The Student Health Provider recommends using crutches to treat your leg injury.

Crutches allow you to avoid walking/standing (weight-bearing) on the injured leg. By taking the weight off your leg, your injury should heal faster.

### THE FOLLOWING SUGGESTIONS WILL HELP YOU USE CRUTCHES:

- 1- When using crutches, bear the weight of your body through your hands; do not bear weight by resting the top of the crutches on your armpits. Resting the crutches on the armpits can injure nerves and block blood vessels in the armpits, causing pain and tingling in the arms and hands.
- 2- Adjust the crutches to match your height: You should be able to fit several fingers between the crutch tops and your armpits when you stand with the crutch tips in front of you 6 to 12 inches. Fit the handgrips so you have a slight bend at the elbow, allowing you to push on the crutches with your hands.
- 3- When standing, always keep the crutch tips in front of you. Your good foot and the crutch tips should form a triangle, not a straight line.
- 4- To walk, put the crutch tips in front of you about the same distance you would normally put your foot when taking a step. Push down with your hands and step past the crutches with your good foot. When your foot is firmly planted, move the crutches in front of you again.
- 5- To turn, pivot on your good foot while moving the crutches one at a time.
- 6- To go up steps, use a railing whenever possible. Hold two crutches together under the arm opposite the rail. Whenever possible, have another person assist you going up or down stairs, acting as a "spotter." A spotter should stand below you on the stairs, with his/her feet balanced on two different steps in order to catch you if you fall.
  - If you are unable to use a railing, go up steps in the following manner: Pushing down firmly with your hands, advance up one step on the good leg. When the leg is firmly planted and you feel steady, bring the crutches up to the same step. Repeat this process slowly for each step.
  - If you are unable to use a railing, go down steps in the following manner: Put both crutches down one step from where you are standing. When balanced, push down firmly with your hands and step down with the good leg.
- 7- Be especially careful using crutches on slippery or wet surfaces. Take smaller steps than normal. Be careful on small rugs or mats as well.
- 8- Use your crutches! Do not bear weight on the injured leg until your doctor advises it is safe.
- 9- If you develop symptoms of injury to the nerves or blood vessels in the armpits, return to the Student Health Center or see your personal/referral doctor at once. Specifically, seek medical care if you develop continuous numbness in your arms or hands, or lose function in your hands or wrists.