

## Walker or cane? Do I need one?

By Karla Andrews

In working with older adults I am frequently asked: “How will I know if I should be using a cane or walker?” Comments I frequently encounter include: “My balance isn’t great but I don’t need a walker yet” or “I have only fallen a couple times and it wasn’t that serious.”

There are many age-related changes that may lead someone to require a mobility aid. These include, but are not limited to, decreased leg strength, poor standing balance, limited walking endurance and visual impairments.

Walking aids are tools you can use to maintain your mobility and independence. They are used to compensate for lack of balance, decrease the weight on an injured, fragile or weak leg, decrease the effort and energy required to walk and reduce the risk of falling. Commonly prescribed mobility aids include various canes and walker models along with walking poles.

Here are a few things for you to ask yourself if you are wondering whether you should be assessed for a mobility aid.

Do you find yourself reaching for walls or furniture to steady yourself when moving about your home?

Do you like, or need to hold someone’s arm when you are walking outside?

Do you find it easier to walk when you hold onto the shopping cart at the store?

If you are thinking about purchasing a walking aid, be sure to consult a Registered Physiotherapist or other qualified health professional to ensure you obtain an appropriate assessment and walking aid prescription. The assessment should include evaluation of your gait, strength and balance. Your health history, size and age are also key considerations when selecting a gait aid. Some walking aids are like cars; they come with a lot of options. You want to ensure the one you’ll obtain is comfortable, easy to maneuver and gives you the added stability you need.

I encourage all my clients to be physically active. The health benefits from walking are enormous. Walk if you can and be safe about it.

Karla Andrews is a Registered Physiotherapist who has special interest in working with older adults in the Guelph area. Her company is Andrews In-Home Physiotherapy. Contact her at 226-971-0538, [andrewsphysiotherapy@gmail.com](mailto:andrewsphysiotherapy@gmail.com) or view her website, [www.andrewsphysiotherapy.com](http://www.andrewsphysiotherapy.com)