

# Rules of the Road for Using Walkers

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Do your patients know the “rules of the road” for safely using and caring for their walkers? Over time the walker becomes a part of the patient, just as the car was an extension of him or her when driving. However, these mature drivers may need to be reminded of safety rules for using walkers. Below are reminders of the “rules of the road” for your patients.

## Safe Driving Points

1. Getting started
  - The therapist will adjust the walker to your height. With your arms relaxed at your sides the top of the walker should line up with the crease on the inside of your wrist.
  - Follow the therapist's instructions for using your walker and stand inside the walker as you push it.
  - Stand up straight in your walker to prevent backaches and to see ahead of you.
2. Seeing and analyzing what is around you
  - Wear your glasses and hearing aids so you can see and hear what is around you. Be sure hearing aids are working and glasses are clean.
  - Look at the entire scene around you for problems, such as someone who has stopped in the middle of the hall.
  - Look ahead, to both sides, over your shoulder, and behind before changing lanes in the hall, stopping, or backing up.
  - Watch for traffic coming from side rooms or when you are approaching busy areas such as the dining room.
  - When exiting a room, look both ways first before entering the hall.
  - Watch for hazards such as uneven elevator floors, rugs, or warning signs. Look ahead for a short distance, not just at the front of the walker.
3. Communicating with other drivers
  - Signal before changing direction and stopping.
  - Pull to the side of the hall, out of traffic, to talk with friends or if you need to rest.
  - Keep in your lane (side of the hall) and watch for people passing you.
4. Adjusting your speed to conditions
  - Keep at a speed that is safe for you and allow others to pass.
  - Keep up with the flow of traffic or pull over so others can pass.
  - Adjust your speed to the amount of traffic.
  - Do not “tail gate.” If the person ahead of you stops suddenly, you could both be hurt.
5. Maintaining a margin of safety
  - Keep a safe distance between yourself and the person in front of you.
  - Avoid running into people or objects. Both of you can be hurt.
  - Be aware of hazards such as wet floors or objects in the way.
  - Prevent wheels from getting caught when entering and exiting the elevator.
6. Parking your walker
  - Park your walker in designated areas. No double parking.
  - Use “valet parking” in dining rooms to keep paths clear. The staff will bring the walker to you when you are ready to leave.
  - When parked, be sure your walker is not obstructing traffic.
  - When not using the walker, fold it to reduce size.
  - When opening the walker, be sure sides are locked in place before using.
7. Handling emergencies
  - If there is a collision between you and a person or object, report it and check for problems or injury.
  - If you see an accident, report it.
8. Keeping your “vehicle” in safe, working condition
  - Check that wheels are clean and rolling well every month.
  - Check the rubber tips on the legs of the walker every month. Replace them if they are worn.
  - Consider using skids or tennis balls on the back legs of a two-wheeled walker to make the walker move easier.
  - Check the three- or four-wheeled walker (rollator) brakes and seat every month.
  - To prevent tipping, do not overload your walker with bags.
  - Do not sit on the rollator and let someone push you. It was not made to support your weight when being pushed and could tip over.
  - If broken, do not use the walker or rollator until it is repaired.
  - Know how to get repairs completed.
9. Keeping you in shape to “drive”
  - Wear clean glasses and working hearing aids.
  - Wear sturdy shoes for a firm base of support.
  - Avoid long skirts, pants, or bathrobes that can cause you to trip or fall.
  - Watch for dizziness caused by medication or by standing up too quickly. If you are dizzy when getting up, stand still or sit until dizziness passes before walking.
  - Stand straight and step into your walker to prevent falling.
  - Prevent walker or rollator “road rage.” Check your emotions before you drive.
  - Show courtesy to other drivers (walker and rollator users) at all times.
10. Driving in new areas (out of the hospital or off the rehabilitation unit)
  - Slow down until you get to know the area.
  - Watch for new hazards such as pets, grandchildren, or anything on the floor.
  - Arrange furniture to accommodate the size of the walker and ensure a clear pathway.
  - Look ahead for uneven sidewalks, inclines, or other hazards.
  - Follow the therapy directions for going up or down a step, curb, or incline.
  - Do not use the walker or rollator on an escalator.

Rehabilitation nurses and staff can collaborate with physical therapists to instruct our patients in “walker etiquette” for their safety and the safety of others. 

## Resources

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