

north valley

**community connection**

## When is the Right Time to Use a Walker?

By Carla Kazimir PT

In physical therapy, we frequently recommend the use of an assistive device such as a cane or a walker. It is part of a plan for fall prevention. Many of our patients are reluctant to use a walker. It is a touchy subject. But it is a subject worth discussing because the decision can prove to have tremendous benefit to the person.

The main reason one would use a walker is for a balance deficit. A walker has four points of contact to the ground. If one of your legs buckles, your arms and your good leg would steady you. If you suffer from dizziness a walker will help you from falling over. If you have a painful joint, a walker will allow you to put only part of your weight on that joint. A person with numbness in their feet will definitely benefit from a walker because their balance is impaired when they can't feel the ground.

A lot of my patients are afraid to use a walker because they think they will become dependent on a walker. A walker is not a drug. A walker will not create dependence. The only person that becomes dependent on a walker is a person with a balance deficit. I have treated patients well into their 90s after hip surgery. If the reason for the walker is weakness after surgery, the person will soon wean themselves from the walker within a few months.

A person with a balance deficit worries a lot about falling. They hang on to the walls and the furniture and they naturally become more inactive because they are afraid of hurting

themselves and breaking a bone. A walker will allow a person to have better stability so that they can go out and enjoy themselves and not worry about every step they take. A walker can actually help a person with a balance deficit get stronger because they are able to become more active.

Many of my patients are reluctant to use a walker because they feel it will make them look old. It is my opinion that facial expression and good posture is a better indicator of youth than a walker. I think it is much more pleasing to see a confident person with a walker than a person with fear in their eyes teetering along grabbing onto things.

A physical therapy evaluation can determine if someone needs a walker and what type of walker would be good. There are several different styles. Many times physical therapy can help someone with their balance so a walker is not necessary. This article is not intended to discourage people from wanting to be independent.

My 91 year old aunt lives in an apartment with 13 steps to her home. She broke her hip 3 months ago. She had had a couple falls and knew she had a balance problem but did not want to use a walker because she wanted to be independent. After 2 months she was back in her apartment. She uses a front wheeled walker in her home. She has a rollator walker in the trunk of her car for when she goes out. She uses a cane to navigate the stairs from her apartment



to her car. She is still very independent. She is thrilled that she made the transition to using an assistive device. We customized a solution so that she could remain in her apartment and minimize the risk of future falls. She said it was a huge wakeup call and she encourages others to get evaluated before breaking a bone.

North Valley Physical Therapy is located in the Knollwood Shopping center at 11858 ½ Balboa Blvd, Granada Hills, Ca 91344. Phone 818-217-4868 [www.northvalleypt.com](http://www.northvalleypt.com). The clinic is owned and operated by Carla Kazimir PT. We are Medicare and Blue Shield providers and we bill all private insurances and have a cashed based Wellness Program. Carla Kazimir has been helping physical therapy clients in the San Fernando Valley since 1984.