



.... the walking frame specialist

Get the facts first!

Users and potential users of mobility products may be missing out on important health and safety points because they fail to receive the correct advice. This could be a cause for concern, potentially resulting in secondary health issues and safety concerns for the user. Based upon their extensive knowledge and experience Uniscan Limited has developed this useful free information guide to help you better understand walking frame products.

About this document

The information in this document is provided by Uniscan Limited an independent, family owned and run company specialising in the design, development and manufacture of walking frame products and accessories. Tom Morris founded the company in 1983 when he designed and developed a unique walking aid called the 'A-frame' in his garden shed. Today some 26 years on from the first 'A-frame' model Uniscan is established as the British walking frame specialist. From their factory in Essex Uniscan produce a range of walking frames to suit the specialised needs and individual budgets of their customers.

Will a walking frame help me?

Today, more than ever we are encouraged to keep ourselves active and busy. Whilst balancing a busy social schedule and keeping pace with family life, many people still enjoy an active life. Unfortunately, over time, wear and tear inevitably takes its toll. Thankfully, advances in mobility aid products in combination with better advice allow people to maintain some level of freedom and independence providing them with the opportunity to continue with the activities they enjoy.

Stay active, be independent and promote a healthy lifestyle

Walking is important for people of all ages and fitness levels but what many people don't realise is that even when you are using a walker or rollator, walking is still an excellent form of exercise. It may help to improve balance, while increasing or at least maintaining leg muscle strength. Always check with your doctor before undertaking any form of exercise.

When walking becomes difficult it really brings home just how much we all take our freedom and independence for granted. Simple every day tasks can become major events and some people become dependent upon help from others - this needn't always be the case. A combination of new technology, ideas and materials developed in conjunction with users and healthcare professionals has resulted in a host of new mobility equipment becoming available. These products provide the opportunity for users to maintain or regain that all important freedom and independence.

The walking frame is one such product. From humble beginnings the 'Zimmer' frame concept has evolved into a sophisticated range of mobility assistance products. A selection of different types, features, options, sizes, colours and prices is available to the prospective user. Having identified the need, just where should you begin?

The jargon

Understanding the jargon can be a big problem. There is sometimes a lack of consistency and clarity throughout the industry. In general terms walking frames are grouped into different categories each one providing a range of choice.

e.g.

| Walking Frame Type | Description and characteristics |
|---------------------------|---|
| Pulpit ('Zimmer') | traditional walking frame, where the frame is lifted, placed in front then the user steps up to or into the frame. |
| Reciprocal | allows each side of the frame to be moved forward alternately as the user moves forward. |
| Rollators | walking frames on wheels that do not require the user to lift the frame. This type allows a more normal walking pattern. |
| Gutter Frames | permits the user to transmit bodyweight through the forearms |
| Tri-walkers | walkers with 3 legs where the user walks 'in' the frame – generally take up less floor and storage space than a 4-leg walker and are very manoeuvrable but less stable. |
| Four leg walkers | walkers with 4 legs where the user walks behind the frame – stable configuration with excellent manoeuvrability characteristics |

Just where do I begin?

Purchase price will be a primary consideration as will value for money. Selecting a particular design or type of walker will involve a number of important considerations. Recommendation by an Occupational Therapist, Physiotherapist or other medical advisor may steer you in the right direction. Gather as much information as you can from product suppliers, manufacturers and help groups. This will provide you with a good basis of what is available and from whom. Talk to your friends and colleagues - personal recommendation is a valuable source of information. Visit or call your local Independent Living Centre for free impartial advice - they may have some sample products available for you to try. Ideally, a trial run will soon determine if the product looks and feels right for you.

Who needs a walking frame?

Anyone with walking difficulties wishing to remain active and independent can gain positive benefits from using a walking frame. A walking frame will allow the user to maintain or increase their mobility. Walking frames can also provide an invaluable aid for patient rehabilitation, particularly during recovery after surgery or as a fall prevention measure. The support provided helps to increase confidence, reduce the risk of falls and helps the user to continue participating in favourite activities. Above all, a correctly specified walking frame is an important factor for ongoing safety and well being.

Which walking frame should I select?

Selecting the correct model, style and size is very important. A poorly 'fitted' walker can create more problems than it solves – remember we are all different shapes and sizes and one size does not suit all. The walker should be tailored to your specific needs. Make sure you fully understand the features of the walker to help you determine which type will be most suitable. And finally be sure that the advice you receive is impartial and that the provider understands how to correctly measure you for your walker. Remember all walking frames are not the same and neither are the people that use them.

What is a rollator?

A rollator is a walking frame with wheels and a braking system. It can also include an integral seat, a shopping basket plus a variety of useful optional extras such as a shopping bag, a walking stick holder and even a tray attachment.

Why choose a rollator instead of a stick or a walking frame without wheels?

A rollator is less strenuous to use and makes the walking pattern smoother. It is not necessary for the user to physically lift and place the walking frame, which therefore almost eliminates strain on the arms, back and shoulders. As a result balance and posture are improved and the user will not fatigue as quickly. Consideration should also be given to the leg configuration of the walker. This type of walking frame is also available with a selection of other features for example, a tray attachment, a shopping bag, walking stick holders etc.

Indoor or outside use?

Walking frames may be required for indoor or outdoor use, or both. Wheel size and configuration should be carefully considered when selecting a walking frame. Large diameter wheels allow the walking frame to be manoeuvred on rough surfaces although the user's ability to negotiate rough terrain will obviously need to be considered. Walking frames with smaller wheels are ideal for indoors. Most rollators are supplied with single wheels, which can be prone to becoming trapped in crevices or holes making the walking frame unstable particularly during outdoor use. Most Uniscan walking frames have smaller wheels but are manufactured with a pair of wheels to each axle i.e. 8 wheels per 4 leg walking frame. This combination provides the user with excellent indoor performance and helps prevent instability over rough surfaces when used outdoors. The option of a large diameter wheel size may also be available if required.

Will it be strong enough?

Most manufacturers will provide details of maximum user weights for their products. These vary significantly and you should always check carefully before you make a decision which walking frame is suitable for your weight. Uniscan walking frames have been tested safely up to over 800lbs (57 stones). In most instances the maximum user weight is governed by the user hip width because this will determine how much space is available between the walker handles when the user is seated. For a standard width walking frame we would normally expect the maximum user weight to be in the region of 280lbs (20 stones).

Is it easy to manoeuvre?

Uniscan walking frames are made from high tensile aluminium - a very strong lightweight metal alloy. Using this material means that the product is very light, which combined with a unique construction method provides an incredibly strong structure. Swivel wheels are fitted to the front legs making it extremely easy to move around.

How is it constructed?

Some walking frames are welded together which means refurbishment and servicing can be particularly difficult if not impossible. All Uniscan walking frames are assembled using rivets allowing for easy component repair or replacement should the walking frame become damaged - this often avoids the need for a replacement walking frame and can save money in the long run.

Is it transportable?

Most models are designed to fold for storage and transportation. However, you should check that the model you choose will stand unsupported when folded, as this will ensure that it takes up minimum space and will not be in the way - particularly important if you plan to use public transport or storage space at home is limited. A further important consideration is that it clips together in the folded position so that it will not fly open when it is stored or when lifted for transportation. Finally, check the weight of the walker. Lifting it into or out of a car, or on and off a bus and even negotiating kerbs or small obstacles may cause injuries if the product is too heavy. All Uniscan walking frames are ultra-lightweight. Most of these walkers will fit into a family car boot in the folded position.

What height should the seat be?

The seat height on your walking frame is very important. Too low and you may experience difficulty rising from it after resting. It is important that both feet are comfortably flat on the floor in the seated position. This will ensure that when seated you can rise comfortably and that the seat edge is not putting pressure on the back of the thighs, which could cause circulation problems resulting in temporary numbness of the legs and the risk of loss of balance possibly resulting in a fall. To find the correct seat height follow these simple steps (*It may be useful to get someone to help you when you measure the seat height*): -

- Find a hard chair with arms (this will help simulate sitting and rising from the walking frame seat) e.g. a kitchen or dining chair that you can comfortably sit on and rise from. Then take the measurement from the floor to the seat - this will provide you with the seat height most suitable for you.

What handle height should I have?

Ideally it is important to maintain an upright posture when using a walking frame. However this is not always practical or possible and can be dependent on the user's physical capabilities. In general terms you should not have to reach up or down for the handles. They should be at a level where they are comfortable to grip. To establish the correct handle height for you follow these simple steps - (*you may need a little help with the measuring*): -

- Stand as straight as possible with your arms relaxed by your sides
- Measure the distance between the inside of your wrist (at the point where your hand joins your wrist) and the floor - this measurement provides the ideal handle height for you

Why is size important?

The correct size walking frame to suit your personal characteristics is crucial to your safety and comfort. A walking frame is a valuable aid to mobility assistance and **one size will not fit every person**. People come in a variety of shapes and sizes with varying needs and requirements. Always remember that **a walking frame should be made to fit the user** not the other way round.

Are there different types of braking system?

There are two main types of brake system available and selection is often based upon personal preference. Some users find certain brakes easier to use because of their hand strength and positioning.

The first type is an automatic braking system designed to operate when the user leans on the handles or sits on the seat. This system can be adapted for different user weights and user operating styles but in any event it will always engage if the operator stumbles or places their weight on the handles or seat. The Uniscan Limited automatic brake system utilises two 1.5 inch diameter (38mm) rubber ferrules to brake the walking frame safely.

The second system is similar in principal to bicycle brakes in that levers on each handle are squeezed to apply the braking action. In addition a locking feature is often included to lock the brakes in the 'on' position when seated. This design does not operate automatically if the user stumbles and requires a level of dexterity, co-ordination and hand strength to operate the brakes. Care must be taken when seated to ensure the 'locking' mechanism is engaged correctly to prevent the walking frame moving around.

Are all walking frames the same width?

If the walking frame is to be used indoors consideration has to be given to the environment within which it will operate. If rooms and doorways are small or narrow then the product may be chosen based upon its width. Narrow walking frames may not be quite as stable as wider models, but if they allow you to use them in your home then they may be the best choice. In addition to the narrow and standard width models Uniscan Limited offer a wider model to suit individual requirements.

Is there a choice of colour?

You are no longer limited to one colour. Choices of standard and special option colours are available to suit your personal preference.

What accessories and attachments are available?

Uniscan Limited offers a comprehensive range of extras within their walking frame product range. Items include an underseat folding nylon shopping caddy, a shopping bag, a tray with non-slip mat, and an additional walking stick holder.

What about after sales support?

Check out the manufacturers guarantee to establish exactly what is covered and for how long. Ask about the availability of spare parts and if the supplier or you can obtain them easily. Ensure the product is supplied with a user guide so that you have a reference point to help you understand the operation and features. The user guide should provide you with all the information you need including any maintenance tips and contact telephone numbers in the event of any queries. Establish if a service or refurbishment programme is available.

Quality & Value for money

Balance your requirements carefully against your budget. Where practical don't compromise quality or features for price - these products are designed to help you, choose carefully and you will enjoy the benefits. Carefully consider all aspects before you commit to purchase. A cheaper purchase price may not always be cheapest in the long run.

Help and Information

Uniscan Limited operates a free information helpline (**0845 634 3083**) to assist with enquiries regarding walking frames. This service is completely free and callers are under no obligation whatsoever to purchase. A free information pack for Uniscan products is available by request.

About the Author

Geoff Morris is Sales & Marketing Director for Uniscan Limited and has compiled this information utilising first hand customer feedback and the extensive experience and knowledge available from the Uniscan team.