

WHICH WALKER

A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO CHOOSING THE
CORRECT WALKING EQUIPMENT FOR
YOU



INTRODUCTION

If you are looking to purchase a walking frame please take your time, do not be “rushed” into buying anything you are not 100% comfortable with.

When we carry out an individual assessment in our showroom we allow at least an hour (and this is after the person has decided they want a walking frame!) to go through all of the various options open to them in terms of size, width, brakes and model etc. We like to ensure that the person who will be using the frame is comfortable lifting and folding the walker as well as walking along with it.

Buying a walking frame is like buying any “fitted” item, you need to ensure that it’s your size, ideally you should “Try before You Buy”, but if that’s not possible, make sure you can return/exchange the product if its not suitable.

Uniscan has been designing and manufacturing walking frames since 1983 and we have had literally thousands of satisfied customers; part of our success is that we provide comprehensive information and give people time to make the right decision for them.

In an ideal world there would be every opportunity for you to visit a qualified/knowledgeable person, be assessed and have the correct walking frame recommended for your needs, but for lots of people for very different reasons this is not possible.

As you can now buy walkers from lots of places, for example; from an advert in the paper, mail order, on line, via a shop (where some of the staff may have limited knowledge about the product), we decided to produce a document to help you make the right choice.

This document has been put together from our experience in dealing directly with people who are looking to purchase a walking frame. Not everyone we assess or spend time talking to on the phone buys one of our walkers. However, whether they buy from us or not we always try to ensure that they have all of the information they need to make the correct choice.

Hopefully this document will give you all the information you need, but if you have any questions at all, or you are not sure about something, please do not hesitate to call us on 01268 419 288 and one of our friendly staff will try to help.

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.

A person of any age can use a walking frame, as long as they have the ability to “walk”, but need extra support.

Will a walker help me?

If walking is difficult, you struggle to get about on your own, or find that using a stick (or two) is also restricting you; then the answer is probably yes. Walking is not only a great form of exercise it allows you to regain or maintain your independence*.

Unlike a conventional walking frame (ie one without wheels) which forces you to move forward slowly and in uncomfortable stages, a wheeled walker allows you to walk in a more natural position. You can keep your head up and look forward, rather than down at the floor

You will quickly discover that a wheeled walker, when used correctly, could help your posture and may help eliminate the pain in your shoulders and lumbar region normally associated with using walking sticks or conventional walking frames.

There are lots of walkers available today and it is crucial that you get one that matches your requirements. A poorly “fitted” walker can in some cases cause more problems than it solves. People come in all shapes and sizes and what suits one person may not suit another.

****Please ensure that you check with your doctor, OT or Physiotherapist before you undertake any new exercise particularly if you have an existing medical condition.***

Which Walker?

We would recommend that before you purchase any walking frame you ensure that it is right for you (or the person that you are buying it for).

There are lots of walkers available today and sometimes just the terminology can be baffling, so here is a little list of what you may come across:-

- **Pulpit – often referred to as a 'Zimmer'** - traditional walking frame. These models do not generally have wheels fitted, although some may have small ones fitted on the front legs. This type of 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/walkers or sometimes referred to as “Trolleys”** - on wheels that do not require the user to lift the frame. This type allows a more normal walking pattern.
- **Gutter or forearm support 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 may be less stable.
- **Four leg walkers** - walkers with 4 legs where the user walks behind the frame – stable configuration with excellent manoeuvrability characteristics.

So, Just where do you begin?

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.

How to select to correct walker?

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.***

Facts you need to know about the User:-

- The height of the person using the walker - important for both the handle and seat height
- The weight the walker will need to take, check that the walker is suitable for the weight of the person using it
- The braking system - does the user have limited strength in their hands, will they remember to apply brakes, do they lean heavily, or are they very frail?
- The weight of the walker – if the user needs to lift the walker (up steps, on and off a bus, into a car boot)
- 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.
- 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.

Getting the Right Size

The seat height on your walking frame is very important. Too low and the user 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 the user 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 in the legs and the risk of balance loss possibly resulting in a fall.

To find the correct seat height follow these simple steps (It may be useful to get help when measuring 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 is comfortable to sit on and rise from. Then take the measurement from the floor to the seat this will provide the most suitable seat height.

The correct handle height 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 the user 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 follow these simple steps (a little help may be required with the measuring):

Stand as straight as possible with arms relaxed by your/their side, Measure the distance between the inside of the wrist (at the point where the hand joins the wrist) and the floor this measurement provides the best indication of the ideal handle height.

NB Handle Height should always take priority over the seat height – remember first and foremost the product is designed as a walking aid.

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 the user to operate the walker in their home then they may be the best choice.

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 they can be obtained easily. Ensure the product is supplied with a user guide so that a reference point is readily available to help understand the operation and features. The user guide should provide all the information needed including any maintenance tips and contact telephone numbers in the event of any queries.

Establish if there is a refurbishment service and spare parts are readily 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. Carefully consider all aspects before committing to buy - a cheaper purchase price may not always be best value in the long run.

Finally; remember that although similar in appearance, walkers are not "all the same". Construction methods, material quality, guarantees, after sales support, frame size, colours etc vary widely.

Here are some images of 3 and 4 leg walkers from Uniscan



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.



WEB: www.uniscan-walkers.co.uk **TELEPHONE:** 01268 419 288
EMAIL: sales@uniscan-walkers.co.uk

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