CRUTCHES & DRIVING

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Crutches keep weight off the healing leg and keep you steady while you do it. This sheet covers how to fit them, how to walk with them on level ground and on stairs, and when it is safe to drive again. **Your surgeon will tell you which weight-bearing precaution applies to you** — find it in the table below and follow it everywhere, including on the stairs.

WEIGHT-BEARING PRECAUTIONS

PRECAUTION	WHAT IT MEANS
Non-weight bearing	**No weight at all** through the involved leg
Touch-down weight bearing	Only the **ball of the foot** touches the floor, for balance
Partial weight bearing	Up to a **maximum of 50%** of your body weight through the involved leg
Weight bearing as tolerated	**As much weight as you can tolerate** through the involved leg

FITTING YOUR CRUTCHES

BEFORE YOU START

- There should be a **two-finger space** between your armpit and the top pad of the crutch
- Your elbow should rest at about a **15° bend** when you hold the grips
- **Practice walking with the crutches before your surgery**

WALKING ON LEVEL GROUND

TECHNIQUE

- Place the crutch tips about **6″ in front of and 6″ to the side** of both feet
- Advance **both crutches** first
- Then the **involved leg**, followed by the **uninvolved leg**
- Continue in that sequence, applying your weight-bearing precaution with every step

STAIRS WITH A RAILING

TECHNIQUE

- **Going up:** hold the rail with one hand and both crutches in the other. Step up with the **uninvolved leg** first, then bring up the crutches and the involved leg
- **Going down:** hold the rail and place the crutch on the lower step. Bring the **involved leg** down to meet the crutch, then the uninvolved leg

STAIRS WITHOUT A RAILING

TECHNIQUE

- **Going up:** step up with the **uninvolved leg**, then follow with the crutches and the involved leg
- **Going down:** place the crutches on the lower step, then the **involved leg**, then the uninvolved leg

Apply your **weight-bearing precaution on the stairs exactly as you do on flat ground.** The sequence changes; the amount of weight you may put through the leg does not.

TIPS & SAFETY

EVERY DAY

- **Carry your weight through your hands, never through your armpits**
- If you need to rest while standing, squeeze the crutches between your arms and your chest wall
- Pay attention to the surface you are on — carpet, hard flooring, concrete, gravel

BEFORE YOU COME HOME

PREPARATION

- Remove scatter rugs and rearrange furniture anywhere you will be walking
- If you feel light-headed or dizzy, stop using the crutches — if it happens while you are walking, **call for help**

DRIVING GUIDELINES

Driving after an orthopaedic injury or operation is both a **safety issue and a legal one**. The guidance below is drawn from the published orthopaedic literature. **Your surgeon will tell you when it is safe for you to drive** — these timelines are a starting point, not a clearance.

RETURN OF NORMAL BRAKING FUNCTION

AFTER	BRAKING RETURNS TO NORMAL
Knee arthroscopy	**4 weeks**
Surgery for an ankle fracture	**9 weeks**
Major lower extremity fracture	**6 weeks** after weight bearing begins

RULES THAT ALWAYS APPLY

DRIVING

- **Do not drive with a cast or brace on your right leg**
- **Do not drive while taking opioid pain medication** — driving under the influence of these medications is against the law

INSURANCE

- Under the terms of most insurance policies, the insurer is **not obligated to cover an accident** in which the driver was still recovering from an earlier injury or operation
- If you are unsure whether you are cleared to drive, call the office before you get behind the wheel

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR RECOVERY?

Call the office with any question about your crutches, your weight-bearing precaution, or when you may drive again.

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CLINIC LOCATIONS

Belle Meade Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine
6002 Highway 100, Nashville, TN 37205

Vanderbilt Orthopaedics Nashville West
6606 Charlotte Pike, Suite 104, Nashville, TN 37209

Vanderbilt Orthopaedics Franklin
206 Bedford Way, Franklin, TN 37064

APPOINTMENTS & QUESTIONS

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ONLINE

LanceLeClereMD.com
vumc.org/orthopaedics

Braking-function timelines from Marecek GS, Schafer MF. Driving after orthopaedic surgery. *Journal of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons.* 2013; 21(11). Insurance guidance from the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, "Delay driving after foot or ankle surgery, experts urge," 20 December 2010.