

A Beginner's Guide To Mobility Aids version 2

WRITTEN BY

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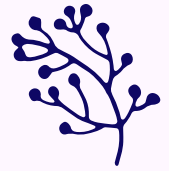
So you're thinking about using a mobility aid?

Coming to the conclusion that you may need a mobility aid can be a whirlwind of emotions. It can be a balance between mourning life before a mobility aid and the excitement of being able to live life more.

Mobility aids vary in their price point, support level, ease of use, and other factors that can make finding the correct aid for you a daunting task. This guide acts as a quick run-down on some popular mobility aids with some considerations for each of them. Hopefully, this aid helps make the task of choosing a mobility aid less stressful.



Changing the view on mobility aids:



As both an occupational therapist and a disabled person, I hear a lot of myths, unhelpful views, and damaging beliefs about mobility aids. I believe these views are archaic and rooted in ableism and able-bodied functionality being the ideal. There are a thousand ways to do the same functional task. I have listed some of the ones below.

MYTH 1: MOBILITY AIDS MEAN YOU'RE GIVING UP.

Mobility aids do not mean you are giving up. Mobility aids are meant as a support to enable you to do the things you need to do but may not be able to do at the moment.

MYTH 2: MOBILITY AIDS WILL LEAD YOU TO BE LESS STRONG.

Mobility aids are used to substitute strength, stability, and balance that you may not have. Most of the time, mobility aids enable you to participate in more activities with less pain.

MYTH 3: MOBILITY AIDS RESTRICT YOUR ABILITY TO DO THINGS.

Mobility aids are meant to increase your ability to participate outside your home.

MYTH 4: A DOCTOR HASN'T PRESCRIBED A MOBILITY AID FOR ME. CAN I USE ONE?

Mobility aids do not need you to have a doctor's permission or a diagnosis to use one.

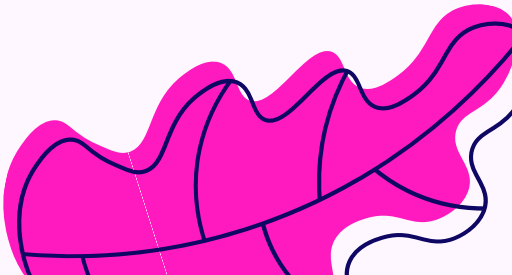


DISCLAIMER:

This guide is not an all-encompassing mobility aid guide. There are hundreds of configurations for mobility aids. Working with a skilled therapist can help you navigate this decision, but I understand that not everyone can get to a therapist for one reason or another. I hope this gives you some info on how to pick out an aid or some considerations when picking one out for yourself!

-itsjanineliz MS OTR/L

A note on version 2: Based on feedback, this version of the guide includes more information on fatigue, stability, dizziness, and more.



When should I start using a mobility aid? | Q

“How do I know I need one?” “Do you think I need a cane?” “When do I know is the right time to use a mobility aid?” This is the number one question that I get asked when discussing mobility aids. The answer I always say to people is “If you are thinking you need one, you probably already do.” Some of the signs that you could benefit from starting to use a mobility aid are:

- You feel unstable or unbalanced when moving around.
- You have increased pain when walking around.
- You have fallen.
- You are dizzy when walking or standing
- You hold onto the counter or furniture when walking around the house.
- You are questioning if you need something to help you get around.
- You have stopped going out or doing the things you love because of your trouble with mobility.
- You find yourself easily fatigued throughout the day.
- Your fatigue is keeping you from doing things outside of the house.



what are some considerations when picking a mobility aid?

PRICE

Mobility aids can vary greatly in price. Some of them can be covered via insurance depending on your benefits.

FUNCTIONALITY AND PRACTICALITY

Mobility aids have different levels of practicality. Some aids can fold up, others are rigid framed. Some can be used in multiple terrains, others are better suited for city streets. All of these things matter when picking an aid.

YOUR SUPPORT NEEDS

Knowing an idea of how high or low your level of support needs are is a determining factor in picking out your mobility aid.

DURABILITY

With the nature of your needs, will you need your aid daily? Or does your condition change day to day? This is important to know when trying to pick out an aid that will last.



If your support needs change daily, you may need access to varying aids.

Ways to use a mobility aid:

PREVENT FLARE UP

Using a mobility aid on days, “you don't need it” can be a way to prevent future flare-ups. Play around with using it on your good days and see if you end up having more good days!

FOR FATIGUE

Using a mobility aid can help you to conserve your energy more leading to longer trips out or less fatigue! For many a mobility aid is the difference between being able to come home and not feel completely exhausted.

FOR PAIN REDUCTION

Mobility aids can help decrease pain in your legs, back and overall. They take the pressure off different areas of your body providing support and relief.

ONLY WHEN YOU NEED IT

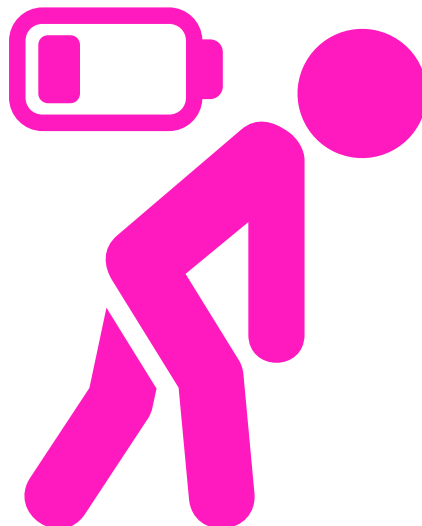
Often people feel guilty if they do not need to use their aids daily. They struggle with feelings of “not being disabled enough” or being “healthy enough”. You do not have to use your aid every day in order to qualify for one.



A NOTE ON FATIGUE

I often get asked by people with fatigue whether or not a mobility aid can be beneficial for them. The answer is absolutely. When considering a mobility aid if you experience fatigue there are some things you need to consider:

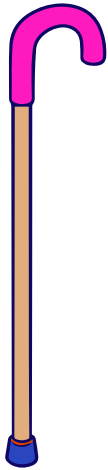
- Is the weight of the mobility aid going to be an issue for you that leads to more fatigue?
- Mobility aids are meant to decrease the amount of strain on your body, this would help with fatigue
- You may be in the group that needs to use your aid even when you think you do not need to use it to avoid a fatigue flare.
- If fatigue is your ONLY issue, then look for a lightweight and easy-to-move. One example of this would be a rolator. Bonus: they also give you a seat.
- What is the hardest part about your mobility? Is it walking? The lack of available seats? or something else?



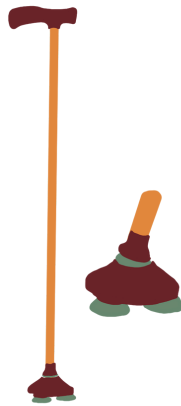
MOBILITY AIDS: CANES

Canes tend to be a first mobility aid for people. They are easy to access and feel palatable for people. They are lightweight and portable. They are relatively inexpensive and can be a great aid to see if mobility aids would be helpful.

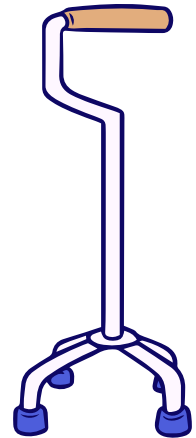
TYPES OF CANES



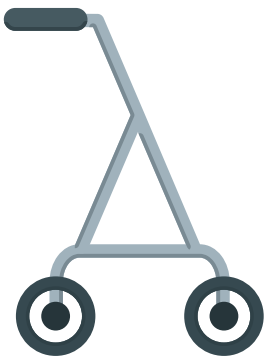
SINGLE POINT CANE



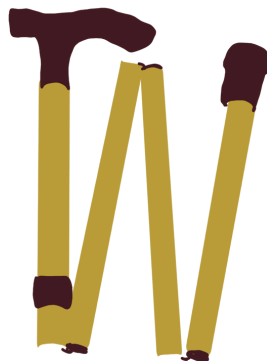
PIVOT FOOT CANE



QUAD-CANE



ROLLING CANE



FOLDING CANE



SEAT CANE

MOBILITY AIDS: CANES

When to use a cane:

- When you need some extra balance.
- For issues with primarily one leg or
- Some increased pain with walking.
- Minor to moderate weakness in your legs or trunk
- when you need help supporting 25% of your weight
- When you have pain in your back, legs or feet
- When you become fatigued with distances or outings out of the house.



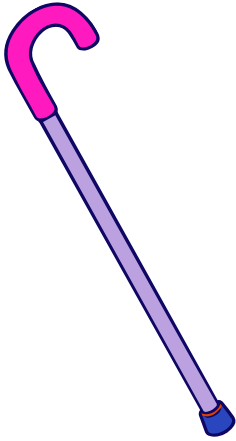
Why a cane might not be a good fit

- You need more than minimal to moderate support.
- You need to be able to decrease the weight on your legs by more than 25%.
- You have significant balance issues.
- You have significant sensory issues in your legs.
- You need somewhere to sit.

MOBILITY AIDS: CANES

The pros and the cons of each type of cane.

SINGLE POINT CANE



Pros:

- easily accessible
- relatively low cost
- light-weight
- relatively portable

Cons:

- Does not provide as much stability as other cane types
- Can be hard on wrists.

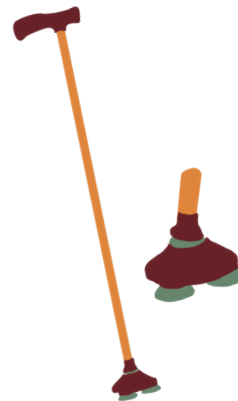
PIVOT FOOT CANE

Pros:

- More freestanding than a single-point cane.
- better on uneven surfaces than a single-point cane

Cons:

- Does not provide as much stability as other cane types
- Can be hard on wrists.



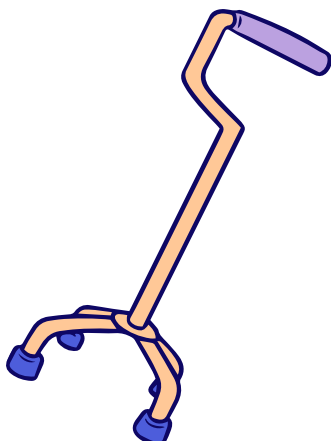
QUAD-CANE

Pros:

- More stable than single-point canes
- Can put more weight on quad cane
- Good for people with one sided weakness (eg stroke)

Cons:

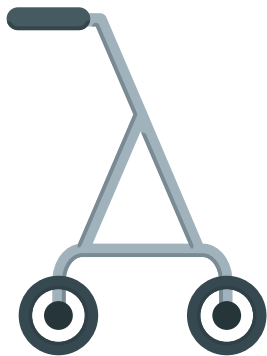
- Heavier than single point canes
- Can be hard to maneuver



MOBILITY AIDS: CANES

The pros and the cons of each type of cane.

ROLLING CANE



Pros:

- Does not need to be picked up
- Most have a bag you can put things in.
- Rolls alongside you.

Cons:

- Bulky and normally not foldable.
- Rolling could be an issue.

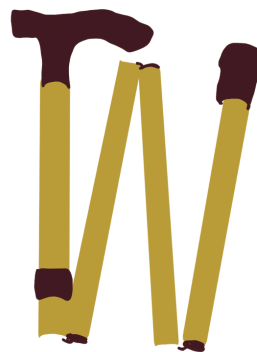
FOLDING CANE

Pros:

- Folds up to be easily portable.
- Normally lightweight.

Cons:

- Not as stable as a rigid cane.
- May not be as durable as a rigid cane.



SEAT CANE

Pros:

- Can take a seat if need be

Cons:

- Heavier than a standard cane
- The seat is generally small without much back support.



MOBILITY AIDS: CRUTCHES



WHEN TO USE CRUTCHES

- When you need to decrease weight on one leg.
- Increased pain with walking.
- You need to keep both legs together and “hop”
- Moderate weakness in legs.
- You need to be able to control how much weight on one or both legs.
- A cane is not providing enough relief

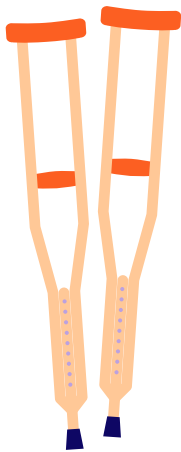
WHY A CRUTCH MIGHT NOT BE A GOOD FIT

- You need more than moderate support.
- You need to be able to decrease the weight on your legs.
- You have significant balance issues.
- You have significant sensory issues in your legs.
- Your shoulders are unable to hold you on your crutches

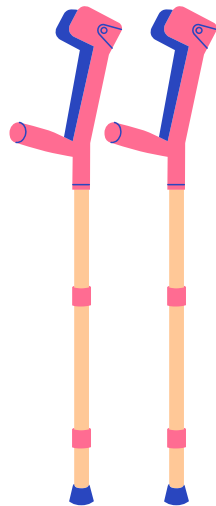
MOBILITY AIDS: CRUTCHES

Crutches are another light weight mobility aid option. You can use one crutch or both crutches at the same time.

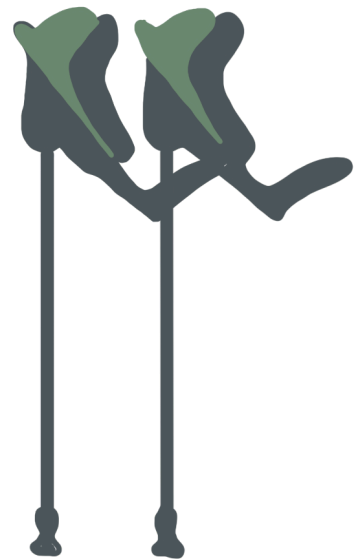
TYPES OF CRUTCHES



UNDERARM CRUTCH



ELBOW CRUTCH



FOREARM CRUTCH

Pros:

- Easily accessible
- Good for offloading weight on one leg

Cons:

- Can be difficult with the wrists or armpits.
- Not easily maneuverable for movements other than hop through or step with.

Pros:

- Lighter than underarm crutches
- More maneuverable than underarm crutches.

Cons:

- Can be hard on the wrists, elbows and shoulders.

Pros:

- The majority of the weight is through the forearm not the joints
- As maneuverable as elbow crutches with practice.

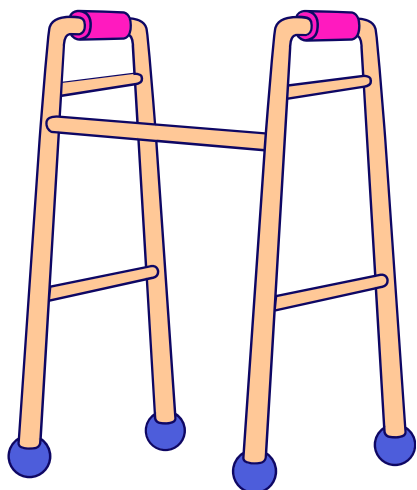
Cons:

- Heavier than elbow crutches
- Tend to be the most expensive option for crutches.

MOBILITY AIDS: WALKERS

Walkers are another relatively portable mobility aid that can be beneficial. For people with fatigue, walkers and in particular rolators can be a game changer.

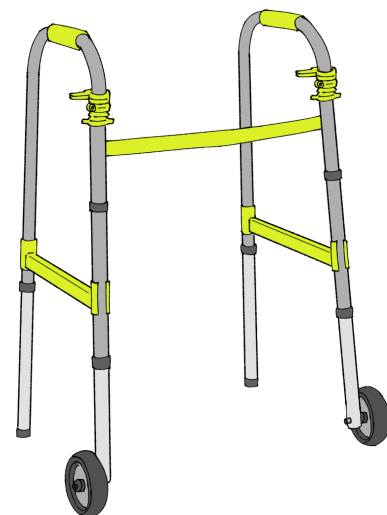
TYPES OF WALKERS



Standard walker



Rolator Walker



Two wheel walker



Three wheel walker



Knee walker

MOBILITY AIDS: WALKERS

WHEN TO USE WALKERS

- You need to be able to offload 50% of the weight on both legs.
- Increased pain with walking.
- Moderate weakness in legs.
- You feel pretty unbalanced.
- A cane or crutches are not providing enough support.
- You have significant fatigue

WHY A WALKER MIGHT NOT BE A GOOD FIT

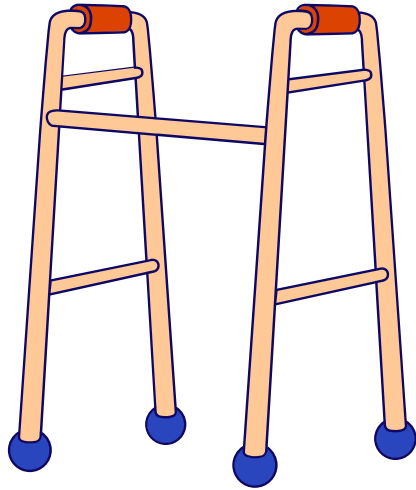
- You need more than minimal to moderate support.
- You need to be able to decrease the weight on your legs.
- You have significant balance issues.
- You have significant sensory issues in your legs.



MOBILITY AIDS: WALKERS

THE PROS AND THE CONS OF EACH TYPE OF WALKER.

STANDARD WALKER



PROS:

- Easily accessible
- Foldable and portable
- No wheels so more stable

CONS:

- Need a good amount of wrist strength to use it.
- Supposed to pick up to move.

ROLLATOR WALKER

PROS:

- Built-in seat.
- 4 wheels and breaks to increase speed.
- Can be great for people with fatigue

CONS:

- Heavier than standard walkers.
- Need to make sure you are able to use safely due to wheels.



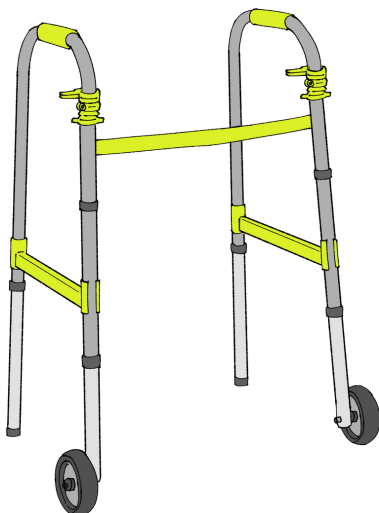
TWO WHEEL WALKER

PROS:

- Easily accessible.
- Foldable and portable.
- Slightly faster than a standard walker.

CONS:

- No seat.
- Not as fast as a rollator.



MOBILITY AIDS: WALKERS

THE PROS AND THE CONS OF EACH TYPE OF WALKER.

THREE WHEEL WALKER



PROS:

- More compact than a rollator
- Same mechanics as a rollator
- Also great for fatigue

CONS:

- Need to make sure you are able to use it safely due to the wheels
- No rollator seat

KNEE WALKER

PROS:

- No pressure on one foot
- Faster than other walkers

CONS:

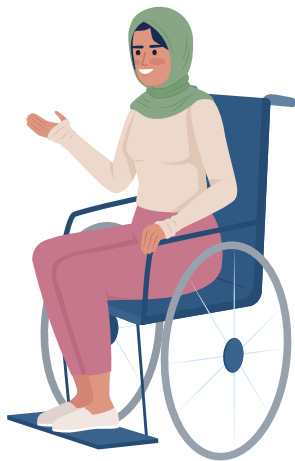
- Need to be able to coordinate using it.



MOBILITY AIDS: WHEELCHAIRS

Wheelchairs have evolved drastically over the past years. Wheelchairs come in many different styles and provide freedom and access to many people.

TYPES OF WHEELCHAIRS



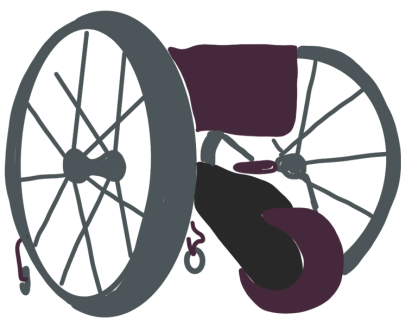
MANUAL WHEELCHAIR



POWER WHEELCHAIR



COLLAPSABLE WHEELCHAIR



POWER ADD ON WHEELCHAIR



SPORTS WHEELCHAIR



POSITIONING WHEELCHAIR

MOBILITY AIDS: WHEELCHAIRS

WHEN TO USE WHEELCHAIRS

- Walking causes you pain.
- You need more support than a walker.
- You have weakness in your legs.
- You have fallen a lot recently.
- You think you would benefit from one.
- You have stopped going out or doing the things you like with your other mobility aids.
- You have significant fatigue or balance issues

SOME CONSIDERATIONS FOR WHEELCHAIRS

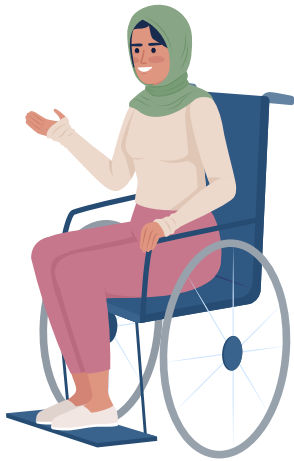
- How much strength you have to propel one.
- What type of frame you'd need.
- Custom-fit chairs can be expensive but can decrease issues with your shoulders.



MOBILITY AIDS: WHEELCHAIRS

THE PROS AND THE CONS OF EACH TYPE OF WHEELCHAIR.

MANUAL WHEELCHAIR



PROS:

- Can be custom fit or purchased from a pharmacy.
- Come with a variety of customizations
- generally less expensive than power wheelchair.

CONS:

- Need to be strong enough to propel the chair.

POWER WHEELCHAIR

PROS:

- Motor propelled so little to no hand/ arm strength needed depending on set up.
- Varying options for propelling

CONS:

- Very heavy
- Unable to be folded down
- Cost is a big consideration
- Will need adaptive van/transportation.



COLLAPSABLE WHEELCHAIR

PROS:

- Pros of a manual wheelchair but collapsable.
- Folds up to save space

CONS:

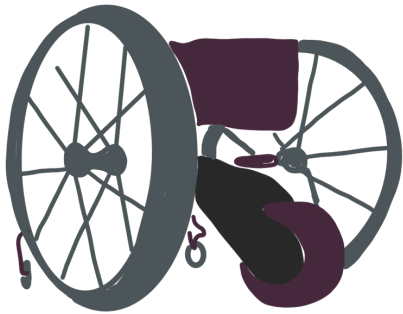
- Same as a manual chair
- Can cause hip issues



MOBILITY AIDS: WHEELCHAIRS

THE PROS AND THE CONS OF EACH TYPE OF WHEELCHAIR.

POWER ADD-ON WHEELCHAIR



PROS:

- Manual wheelchair with spurts of powered energy.
- Can preserve energy at times.
- Can navigate more terrain with ease.

CONS:

- Need to remember to charge
- May not be able to attach and detach the power assist independently.

SPORTS WHEELCHAIR

PROS:

- Generally lighter framed.
- Longer lasting tires
- Can be used during a variety of sports and activities.

CONS:

- Generally noncollapsible
- Normally a secondary chair option as opposed to a primary chair.



POSITIONING WHEELCHAIR



PROS:

- Added pressure relief methods.
- Include a reclining mechanism
- Can relieve fatigue and pain.

CONS:

- Very costly.
- Typically bulky.

PROCESS FOR PICKING A MOBILITY AID

You can pick out a mobility aid on your own or with the help of an occupational or physical therapist. Customized mobility aids will need to be measured and ordered by a therapist. They will help you pick out the best aid for you.

If you are able to, it is recommended that you see a therapist to assist you, but that isn't always possible, so there are online tutorials that will show you how to measure yourself.

In order to learn how to use your aid, you can take it to a therapist. You also can practice on your own. I always suggest people try their aids at home around the house to get used to using them in a comfortable environment.

TIP: Try using an adjustable mobility aid to see what height is the most comfortable for you before purchasing a rigid mobility aid.



WHERE TO FIND MOBILITY AIDS?

You can find mobility aids in a variety of places. Some of the locations will be more expensive than others. Some places you can find mobility aids are

- Ordering through therapists
- Online through the manufacturer
- Through a shopping platform like Amazon
- Pharmacies
- Medical supply stores
- Thrift stores- especially those associated with retirement communities. I have seen crutches for \$3 a pair, manual chairs for \$30, canes, walkers, and more at my local thrift stores.
- Facebook Market place
- Garage sales
- Friends and family
- Your local Assistive Technology office
- & More



TIPS FOR YOUR NEW AID

See some of my tips for working with your mobility aid below!

- Practice at home to get used to your new aid.
- Start with short trips into the community with your aid to get used to using it out and about.
- Try going out for the first time with a supportive person to increase your confidence and comfort with the aid.
- “Better to have it and not need it than need it and not have it.”- I always keep an extra aid in my car, my partner's car, and family members' cars when we go out, so I have one on me if I need it.
- Look into the ideas of internalized ableism, ableism in general and disability theory.



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About Me

Hi, my name is Janine. I am a disabled occupational therapist and coach living with many conditions including Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome and Company. I post educational content and coach other chronically ill and disabled people.

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