

Camera Monopods

This article explains what monopod is, compares it to the tripod and suggests how you should hold it.

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Introduction

A monopod is similar to a tripod in terms of appearance. The difference is that it only has **one leg** (as the term “mono” describes) and that influences its advantages and disadvantages when compared to a tripod.

Comparison between a monopod and a tripod

Advantages over a tripod:

- It has only one leg, using **much less space** and is therefore useful in situations when there is not much space available. Because of that, it is usually (but not always) allowed to be used in various events where there are a lot of people (i.e. sports events) and/or when a tripod is not allowed (often in church, amusement parks, archaeological parks). It can come useful in outdoor photography as well.
- It is **smaller** and **weights much less** than a tripod, therefore, easier to carry and easier to fit in a backpack. But be careful when choosing a monopod based on its weight: if you are using bigger cameras, make sure the monopod can carry it safely and hold it steady!
- Much quicker and easier to set up (there is only one leg to adjust) and change its position.

Disadvantages over a tripod:

- Stability. This becomes evident when you want to use longer exposures.
- Cannot stand on its own.
- Much harder to shoot panoramas.

As you can see, monopod has many advantages over a tripod, but its biggest disadvantage is its stability. Whenever you are shooting longer exposures, panoramas or anything where you need to be precise, tripod is much better choice.

Whether you should buy yourself a monopod or a tripod largely depends on what kind of photography you do and where you shoot. If you are shooting at night, tripod is better. If you are shooting in crowded places or at events, monopod is better. If you want to shoot at different angles, tripod is better. To conclude, use monopod when tripod is not practical, in all other cases a tripod provides a much better support.

Monopod Parts and Features

There are many things to consider when buying a monopod:

- how tall it can get,
- how small it is when folded,
- how much does it weight,
- what material it is made of,
- how many sections it has,
- what kind of feet it has,
- what kind of locks it has,
- how much load can it carry,
- what kind of head to use,
- what accessories are available, etc.

These features are very similar (if not the same) to the ones with tripods. I have fully explained them in [my article about tripods](#).

The only thing really worth mentioning is a **monopod head**.

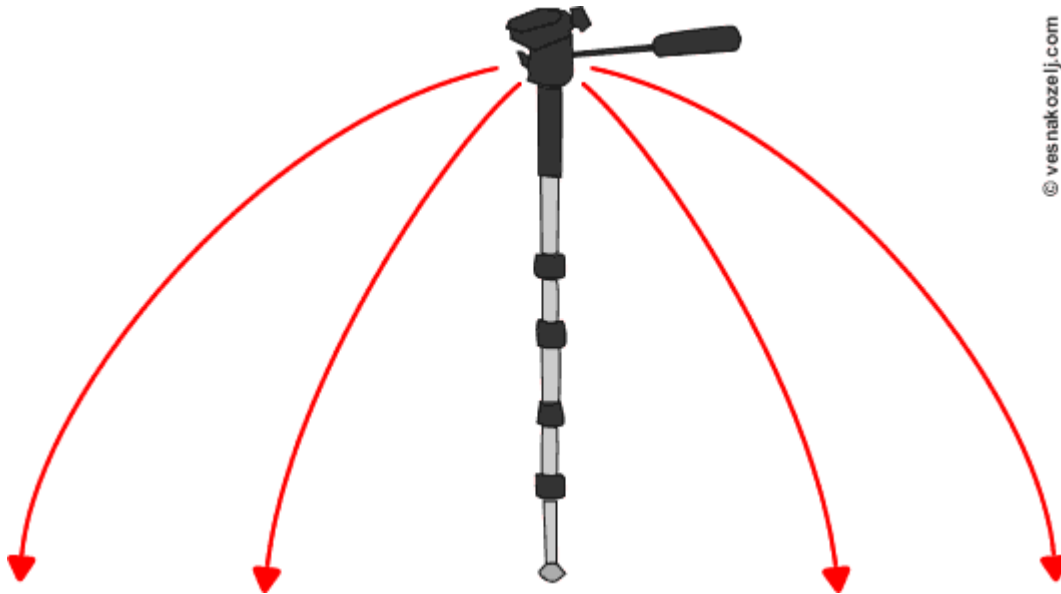
Monopod can either be used with a head or not:

- Some people swear on a monopod **without a head attached** (it is usually possible to use one eventually). Such monopods come with a simple screw on top which you screw directly into a camera's tripod hole. It is true they are quicker to adjust (no adjusting of a head), however, when you want to shoot under an angle, it is tricky to position a monopod to be steady. It is also very difficult to take shots in vertical position.
- For the best use, at least get yourself a **simple ball head** (which is honestly sufficient). It will be much easier for you to shoot under different angles and it also allows you to pan the camera.

How to Hold a Monopod

There is only one leg. Someone needs to hold it to keep it steady!

Probably it is going to be **you** (it is also possible to get some accessories that can help you with that). Even though this does introduce some vibrations, they are much lower than if you were supporting the whole weight of your camera with only your hands.



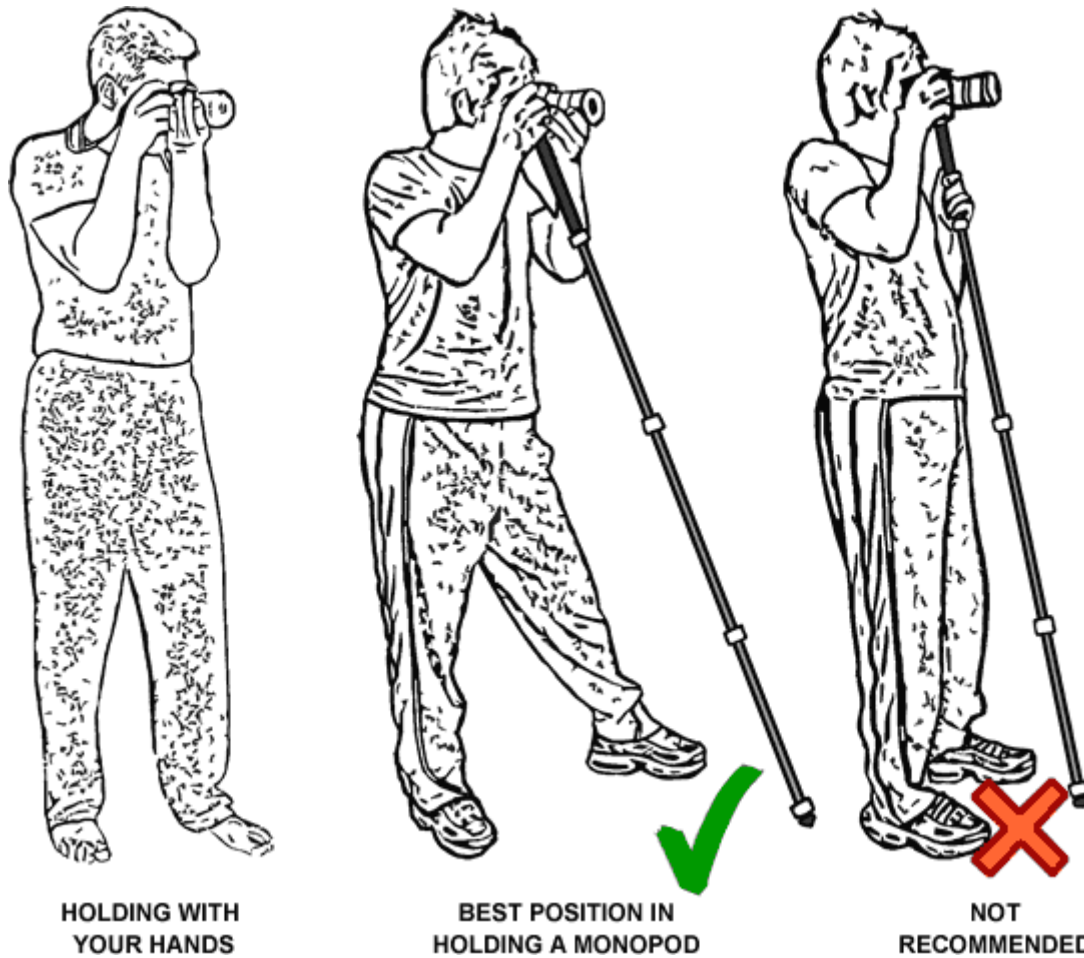
If nothing is holding it, monopod can fall in either direction! That's why keeping it steady (especially for longer times) can be tricky.

Your posture is very important. It will not come to you completely naturally at first, you will need some practice. What kind of posture you are using will also depend on what kind of monopod head you have.

Basic posture

In my [Knol article about how to hold the camera with your hands](#) I have stressed to spread your feet **shoulder distance apart**, with your **left foot a step in front** to provide best stability.

When you are using a monopod it is no different: your left foot should be a step in front of the right foot for the best balance, with the monopod a step in front of your left foot. Then lean a bit forward to balance the weight between monopod foot and your legs.



As you can see, monopod just helps you to **additionally stabilize** your already good, stable posture you provide with your feet. If you do not feel to be standing balanced with your feet, monopod can do just little to improve the steadiness.

Therefore, I do not recommend using the last posture above when you are standing with your feet parallel to each other (something like you could do when shooting with a tripod – but then, tripod can stand on its own!). This posture is not as stable as the one I recommend by far, nevertheless, if you somehow find it stable enough, go ahead and use it.

When you are holding monopod as I have recommended, in this position, it is also very easy to shoot in **different angles** by leaning a bit forward or backward and readjusting the weight between monopod and your legs to find the perfect balance.



When this monopod technique is **not the best to use**:

- Whenever you are in a **crowded place**. This posture requires a bit more space around you.
- When there is **stronger wind**. Wind can cause vibration to the monopod. At those times it is better to use a posture which requires a monopod to be directly pressed against your body.

Posture when monopod is pressed against your body

In this position stand with your **feet parallel** to each other and a **monopod foot behind your leg** (behind the left leg if you are right handed or behind the right leg if you are left handed).



Detailed instructions for a **right handed person** (if you are left-handed, just reverse it):
Either stand with your feet parallel, or step with your right foot a step back. Place the monopod's foot behind your left foot and press the monopod with your hand left and backwards (pushing it more to the ground) to your upper left thigh to support it. Your left knee can be bended or not, whatever feels more comfortable for you.

Another posture when monopod is pressed against your body

This position is good when you **don't have much space around** you and when **the ground is slippery**.



Again, how you stand is different for right- and left-handed person. I will describe the position for the right handed person, if you are left-handed, just reverse it:

This position is similar to the one described above. What you do is stand with your **right foot** about a **step back** from your left foot, **left knee slightly bended**. Place the monopod's foot at your right foot, the right foot is now preventing monopod in sliding backwards. Press it with your hand down and to the left onto your bended left knee.

Remember, since your body is touching monopod as well, it is important to (just like when you are hand-holding your camera) pay attention to your **breathing**: the moment you are taking a shot and pressing a shutter release, try to hold your breath.

Useful monopod accessories

The most simple (and free) accessory to use would be **any solid object** (like a wall or a tree) where you can lean against:

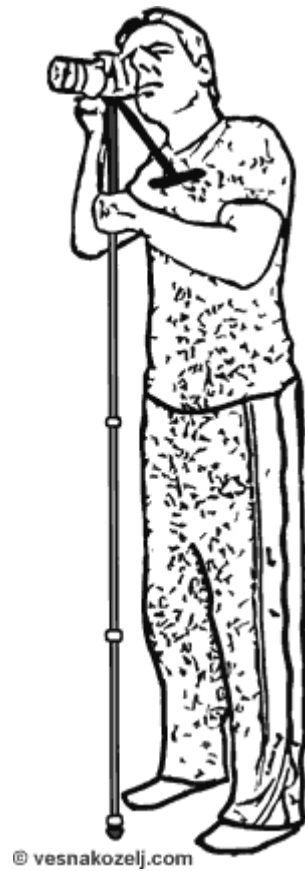


There are also accessories you can buy:

Shoulder brace

If there is **not much room available** and you would really like to have **monopod straight** and right in front of you, try a shoulder brace. It makes monopod much steadier.

It is attached over a screw on top of a monopod, while the other end is braced against your chest. Length is adjustable.

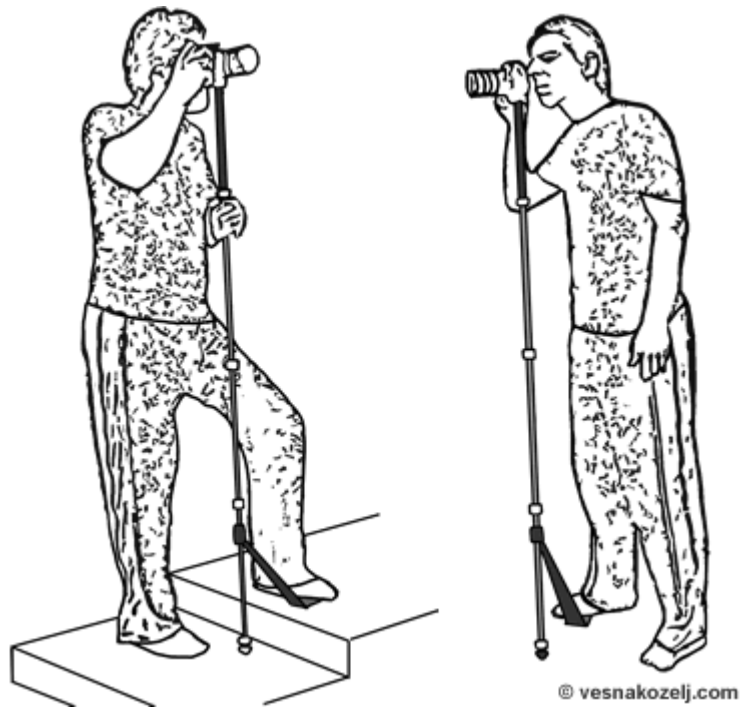


DuoPod

Another accessory that can be quite successful in holding a monopod steady is a DuoPod (developed by [UniLoc](#)).

It has an adjustable foot brace that is attached to a monopod on which you step on. It actually provides so good stability that you can even pan your camera. It also allows you to have your hands free to change batteries, memory cards or lenses.

You can use it either on flat surfaces or on stairs, in the mountains.. The foot can move up or down.



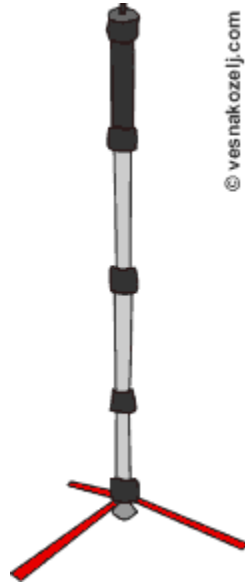
Monopod support bracket

The monopod support bracket is mounted to top of a monopod and turns a monopod into a mini tripod: it has three feet and it can stand on its own. Now you can even take long exposure shots!



Retractable legs

Some monopods have extra pair of retractable legs which allow it to **stand on its own**. Sounds great, but their stability is questionable, therefore don't let it stand alone for longer times (go ahead and change the battery or a memory card though). They do help decrease the vibration.



Bubble level

One of the things that is very useful to have on your monopod, or even better on a monopod head or attached on-top of your camera, is a bubble level. It will be of a great support to know when your camera is levelled!

Walking stick + monopod = hikepod!

Do you go hiking a lot? Maybe bird watching? Why not using **a monopod and a hiking stick all-in-one?**

It has benefits of both walking stick and a monopod: it helps you walk more stable and safer on steep and slippery ground, as well as allows you to mount your camera on top to use it as a monopod.

Some also have a set of retractable legs which turn it into a (semi-steady) tripod.

Note that you should not have a camera attached to it while hiking.

Manufacturers: [TrekTech](#) with TrekPod series and [Gitzo](#) with a MonoTrek (if you know of any other, please let me know).

Xshot Monopod

This monopod was developed by [XShot](#) and was designed for taking **self-portait images**.

Idea behind is simple: When you travel or visit events, you want to be on the pictures as well. Who is going to take the picture though? You can ask a stranger (or your friend who is with you, but to be both on a picture you still need to ask a stranger), or you can get one of these and take it yourself.



Attach the camera (using a custom designed adapter), adjust the length (it can be up to 94cm/37feet long), set a self timer (or use a remote release), hold it still (it is quite light) and take a shoot.

It is appropriate for compact cameras. The manufacturer claims it can support heavier cameras as

well – ok, the xshot monopod can hold it, but can you hold the monopod still (that is a monopod and your camera attached) to take a sharp picture? Hmm...

Conclusion

Monopods are a great accessory: compact, mobile, light and quite stable when used correctly – well, for most types of photography anyway.

If you want to be completely steady to shoot with longer exposures or if it is important for you to be precise (like when taking panoramas), go buy yourself a tripod.

If you are interested about tripods, I have written another [Knol article about tripods.](#)