



Nordic Walking: Information, Technique, and Gear

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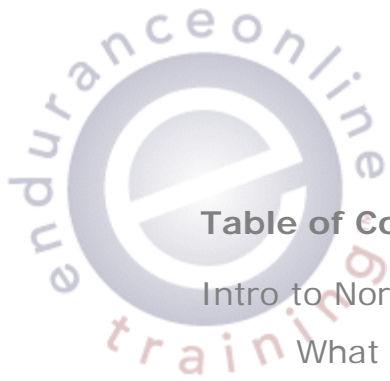


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Intro to Nordic Walking

How can you make walking a better overall workout without feeling like you are exerting any more energy? How can you overcome the slouching, neck and shoulder pain many get from working at desks and computers? In Europe, over 500,000 people have taken up Nordic Walking to give them a good workout and loosen their neck and shoulders.

Nordic Walking began as a summer training exercise for serious "cross country" skiers. Fitness walkers in Europe adopted Nordic Walking as a time-efficient, low-stress, total body workout. Nordic Walking's popularity is growing with walking clubs and instructors leading classes across the United States.

Through Nordic Walking you will burn up to 40% more calories, pump up your cardio by increasing oxygen consumption up to 25%, and reduce stress to your knees and lower joints. You'll reduce heel strike by 26% and get a total body workout that strengthens your upper body and creates resistance to build better bone density.



What is Nordic Walking?

Nordic Walking uses two specially designed poles to work the upper body while walking. Like cross country skiing, the poles are used by the arms to match each step the person takes.

How is it Better Than Just Walking?

Better but Easier Cardio Workout: Nordic Walking increases your heart rate without increasing your perceived rate of exertion. You get a better workout without feeling like you are working any harder. While you can get a similar heart rate effect by walking faster, there are many people who do not want to walk faster or cannot walk fast.

Upper Body Workout: Nordic Walking works the arms, shoulders and upper chest and back muscles through a full range of motion,

stretching and lengthening those muscles which are often tight. The motion works to overcome the hunching forward that many people adopt while working at desks, computers, reading or watching TV. Many people exhibit stress by tightening their neck and shoulder muscles. Nordic Walking loosens up those knots.

Stability and Posture: On any surface, the poles provide more stability for walkers who have balance, knee, or leg problems. Proper use of the poles and arm motion encourages good posture. People who had given up walking for pleasure find that they can walk comfortably with the poles. For natural trails, the poles provide stability for walkers much like a hiking stick.

Who is Nordic Walking?

Nordic Walking has become a major exercise activity since 1997. Today, approximately 500,000 people in Europe enjoy Nordic Walking regularly, and it is spreading in popularity throughout the U.S.. Enthusiasts look ahead to bringing it to

the 30 million fitness walkers in the US, and even more so to those who do not now exercise regularly

An Exciting New Activity: Inactivity is a health threat in all industrial nations, even more so as economies move to the information and technology era. Workers hunched over desks and computers all day develop many problems from stress and inactivity. In Finland, Nordic Walking classes were established throughout the country with recruitment especially of those who were inactive. The classes teach the correct Nordic Walking technique, stretching, and provide a social activity as well. Nordic Walking is not only social and fun the initial resistance to walking with poles is easily overcome when you are walking with a group.



Nordic Walking Technique: The technique is a simple enhancement of normal arm swing when walking. The poles remain behind and pointing diagonally backwards at all times.

Note: See Nordic Walking video for correct technique

- Shoulders are relaxed and down.
- Poles are held close to the body.
- The hands are opened slightly to allow the poles to swing forward - the poles are not gripped but swing from the wrist straps.
- The leading foot strikes the ground.
- The opposite arm swings forward to waist height.
- The opposite pole strikes the ground level with the heel of the opposite foot.
- The poles remain pointing diagonally backwards, they are never in front of the body.
- Push the pole as far back as possible, the arm straightening to form a continuous line with the fully extended arm, the hand opening off the grip by the end of the arm swing.
- The foot rolls through the step to push off with the toe. This lengthens the stride behind the body, getting the most out of each stride.
- The arm motion is loose and relaxed.



Keeping the arms relaxed and keeping the poles behind the body are key elements in the proper technique.

Working and Relaxing Your Upper Body

Walkers have used a variety of techniques and equipment to add an upper body workout to their walk. For instance, race walkers use their arms effectively to give an upper body workout. With correct arm motion, Nordic Walking can relieve neck and shoulder tension while toning upper body muscles.

Total Body vs. Half Body: Nordic Walking poles add an upper body workout for the deltoids, lats, pecs, triceps and abdominals as well as redistributing weight bearing in the lower extremities. By adding the upper body workout, calorie burning is increased up to 40% yet with no increase in how hard the walker feels they are exercising. Nordic Walkers get a "total body" workout without feeling like they are working any harder than just walking.



Relieve Shoulder and Neck Stress: Using the correct Nordic Walking technique with relaxed shoulders, keeping the poles behind the body and using a full range of motion, the walker also releases stress carried in the shoulders and neck. Taking the arms and shoulders through the full range of motion throughout a 30 minute walk is a great antidote to the slouching many people do over desks and computers.

Leave the Weights at Home: Exercise experts do not recommend walking with arm weights, which is another popular way to add an upper body workout to a walk. Arm weights put an unnatural stress on joints, especially over the length of a recommended fitness walk of a half hour to two hours.

Can it Work Without Poles? Walkers can experience similar upper body effects by using correct race walking arm motion. However, that can be difficult to achieve without coaching. Nordic Walking uses poles which loosen the shoulder and neck area, raise the heart rate and tone muscles without additional exertion.

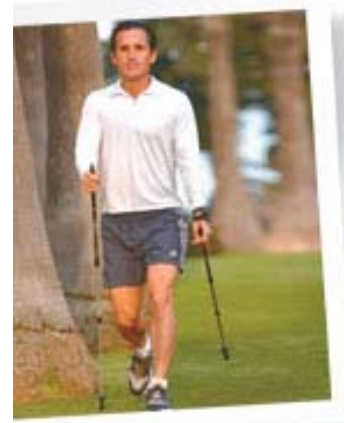


Cardio and Fat Burning Benefits

Nordic Walking burns more calories and enhances a fat-burning walking workout by up to 40%. Most walkers will increase their workout by 10-20%

Higher Heart Rate But Lower Exertion

Recent tests were done at the Vuokatti Sports Center in Finland. Participants walked a steady pace on a treadmill with and without Nordic Walking poles. The poles raised participants heartrate by 10 bpm at the same speed. Participants also reported that walking felt easier with the poles than without, yet their heart rates were increased.



Many fitness walkers do not like the feeling of exerting themselves, yet the best health benefits come from a moderate intensity workout rather than an easy workout. Nordic Walking poles raise the heart rate into the moderate intensity zone without the walker feeling like they are working any harder.

Fat Burning Zone

Nordic Walking exertion is in the fat-burning zone. Researchers at Vuokatti showed how much fat vs. carbohydrate burning was done with and without poles. More fat-burning when using the poles was most evident with those who use the correct pole technique.

Better Workout at the Same Speed

Adopting a fast walking technique or racewalking is a great way to pump up your walking workout. But Nordic Walking poles are an alternative for those who have difficulty walking faster or do not like to walk faster. By using the Nordic Walking poles at your usual walking speed, you increase your workout without going faster. This is also a good alternative for those whose walking partners cannot go faster.



Nordic Walking Poles and Gear

Military personnel in Finland have been using walking poles during their summer walking and running workouts for decades. They are also favored in training and racing by countless ultra-runners and adventure racers. Several varieties of walking poles are on the market for use in two-pole walking techniques. There are differences.

- Weight: Some poles are heavier, some very light.
- Materials: Aluminum vs. carbon fiber.
- Telescoping, adjustable or fixed length: The length of the pole is critical to being able to use the right technique.
- Wrist straps and grips: With the correct strap and grip, the walker does not need to grip the pole at all, it travels via the strap.
- Tips: Spike tips for natural trails, rubber tips for sidewalk or road walking.
- Springs or other cushioning systems.

A lightweight, sturdy pole of the correct length with an ergonomic grip is ideal.

Brands

Leki Trekking Poles: LEKI Nordic Walking Poles all feature a narrow profile "cross country"-style grip with the



Adjustable/Releasable Trigger Strap. Shafts are composed of expedition grade aluminum or carbon. All poles feature Carbide Tips, removable Rubber Fitness Walking Tips and Baskets. www.leki.com

Exel Nordic Walker: A leader in ski pole and hockey stick production, this company is now promoting Nordic Walker poles with great success in Scandinavia. Their poles are ultralight carbon fiber, fixed length, with an wrist strap and grip system. Comes with spike tip and rubber "boot" for road and sidewalk walking.

Exerstrider: The poles are lightweight aluminum alloy with an ergonomic grip. Spike tip and rubber tip for trail vs. pavement.

