

Nordic Pole Walking: A Full-Body Workout



By Dr. Kim

TRY SOMETHING NEW for fall. Nordic or urban pole walking or *exerstriding* is fitness walking with specially designed poles. It combines the aerobic and strength building benefits of cross-country skiing with walking. This full-body, low impact, cardiovascular exercise engages the arms, back, stomach and legs. Developed as a summer training method for Finnish cross-country skiing and winter-biathlon teams, the activity is popular in Scandinavian countries and growing in popularity worldwide because it is easy, fun and convenient. Pole walking is suitable for people of all ages and fitness levels, and can be performed on any terrain.

HEALTH BENEFITS

- Burns up to 46 percent more calories than moderate jogging or exercise walking without poles
- Engages 90 percent of all body muscles compared to 40 percent while walking without poles
- Reduces stress on hips, knees and ankles through the support of the poles

- Reduces pain in neck, shoulders and upper back
- Improves posture, balance and stability

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

Poles: There are two types of poles in the marketplace: with straps and without. I prefer the strapless ergonomic handle because of its shock absorption feature that minimizes vibrations in the wrist, elbow and shoulder joints. Walkers can loosely and comfortably grip the handle and position the hand and wrist in a natural yet functional position.



Pole tips: Rubber boot tips are used for walking on hard surfaces. If you are walking on soft surfaces (grass), remove the rubber tips and use the carbide steel tip of the pole. Snow baskets are used for winter walking.

POLE WALKING TECHNIQUE

The pole walking technique mimics your natural walking style but with the support of two poles. The grip on the handle should be loose and comfortable. When walking, swing your arms as you normally do, swinging opposite arm to leg. Walk tall and proud. The poles are planted behind with each arm extension. Some common errors to avoid are: dragging the poles and keeping arms continually flexed rather than extended when swinging the arms. As beginners become more comfortable with the technique they will learn to “push” the poles into the ground to propel themselves forward. This increases the resistance to your arms and shoulder muscles.

Nordic pole walking is not just walking with poles. It provides a complete body workout. Either individually, with a partner or group, the poles can be used for breathing, mobilization, strengthening, stretching and flexibility exercises; hiking and hill climbing, and interval training.

Try walking with poles – take it one step at a time! ■

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