

Walking with Poles



If you are looking for a year round activity that boosts your metabolism, regardless of your age or fitness level, try Nordic walking. It's easy, it's fun, and all you need are some poles.

Nordic walking has its roots in cross country skiing, as it was originally used as a summer training exercise for skiers to maintain their fitness during the snow free months. Cross country skiing is one of the most effective activities for burning calories and building cardiovascular fitness because both large upper and lower body muscles are fully engaged, however, there are restrictions with skiing that start with a limited snowy season.

Nordic walking overcomes these limitations. It is suitable for all fitness levels and participants can achieve similar benefits all year round without snow. Nordic walking Instructor Anita

Lobban says 'I have been working in health and fitness most of my life and am passionate about all types of sport and exercise. When I first tried Nordic walking I was amazed at what a good workout it was and how much fun I had in such a short period of time.' Nordic walking is defined simply as fitness walking with specially designed poles.

Nordic walking involves walking while applying force to the poles with each stride by way of the strap provided. Compared to standard walking, Nordic walkers use more of their body with greater intensity and receive fitness building stimulation not present in normal walking for the chest, lats,

triceps, biceps, shoulder, abdominals, spinal and other core muscles. Nordic walking can produce up to a 46% increase in energy consumption compared to walking without poles. It also has been demonstrated to increase upper body muscle endurance by 38% in just twelve weeks.

In addition, Nordic walking burns up to 40% more calories than walking. Participants actually reach the same intensity as running but without the high impact and perceived exertion. The poles provide balance and stability, making it accessible for all ages.

Nordic walking poles are different from both cross-country skiing poles and general trekking poles. Nordic walking poles come in one piece, non-adjustable shaft versions, two piece twist locking adjustable shaft versions and telescopic three piece twist-locking adjustable length versions which are

'I have been working in health and fitness most of my life and am passionate about all types of sport and exercise. When I first tried Nordic walking I was amazed at what a good workout it was and how much fun I had in such a short period of time.'

great for fitting into your suitcase or rucksack. The poles feature handles with special clip release Nordic walking straps - a kind of fingerless glove that allows power transmission through the strap and eliminates the need to grasp the pole handles. Not only does this type of strap feel more comfortable but it also avoids the need to grip the handles which would cause an increase in blood pressure as you exercise. It also ensures the correct biomechanical alignment of the wrist to avoid strain.

The poles come with removable 45 degree angled rubber tips for use on hard surfaces and metal tips for softer ground, whether it be a wintery walk in the woods, a summer stroll on the seashore or just an amble around town. Most poles are made from lightweight aluminium or carbon fiber. The Nordic poles are the only specialised equipment required. Once you have your poles you can do your regular running or walking shoes and be ready to go.

The Nordic walking technique is an enhancement of the normal arm swing when walking. The poles remain at a 45 degree angle all the time with a backward plant. This angled plant allows you to propel yourself forward. Shoulders should be maintained in a neutral position to enable the effort to transfer to the larger back muscles and avoid undue stress in the upper back and neck areas.

The hands stay relaxed to allow the

poles to swing forward. As with regular walking, as the leading foot strikes the ground the opposite arm swings forward to waist height. The pole then strikes the ground level with the leading foot.

As the foot rolls through the step from heel to toe the pole is pushed back to the hip, straightening the arm into a full extension. At the end of the step, the pole is lifted forward with the little finger (the hand opens off the handle completely) as you repeat with the other hand and foot. Keeping the arms lengthened and keeping the poles at a 45 degree angle are key elements in the proper technique. Now you are Nordic walking.

If you are ready to commit and buy your own poles, there are a few things you should be aware of. Firstly, the design and material of the hand grip should be ergonomic to sit neatly in the palm of the hand, and not rub when used



with a bare hand. The strap should be designed so that there is no need to squeeze the handle. Instead the pole should move naturally along with the movements of the walker.

The formula for selecting the correct length of poles is most commonly your height in centimetres times 0.7, plus or minus five centimetres. A person who is 5'5" (165 centimetres) would

then use $(165 \times 0.7 =) 115.5$ centimetre (45.5 inch) length poles. Shorter poles offer a less intensive workout and are perfect for people with weight problems, in recovery or coming out of a long period of inactivity, while longer poles offer a more intensive workout great for people with a long sporting history.

Anita says 'I am now hooked on this highly enjoyable activity knowing that it is something I can do well into the later years of my life and I am passionate about passing it on to the community.'

Anita Lobban is based in Manchester and offers Nordic walking, Pilates classes, life coaching and personal training. Anita offers taster sessions for new members for £5, which can be offset against the Learn to Walk course.

For more information go to your.nordicwalking.co.uk/anita_lobban or www.pilates4wellbeing.com.