

Nordic Pole Walking.... the Smarter Way to Walk

By Catherine Egan, B.P.E., M.A., Nordixx Instructor

You may have noticed lately more people out walking with poles, and have perhaps wondered what it's all about.

Walking poles can be used for hiking and trekking, for balance and stability, and as part of a regular fitness routine. More and more walkers are using a variety of poles and styles, and then there are people who are "Nordic Walking". What's the difference?

As a fairly new lifestyle sport to North America, the activity of Nordic pole walking is gaining acceptance in therapeutic and rehabilitation programs, and for exercise. When performed with the correct technique and poles, Nordic Walking uses 90% of the body's muscles and burns up to 46% more energy than walking without poles. That's because more than 55% of our muscles are located above the waist. By incorporating the upper body with the arm swing and poles, more than 600 muscles are engaged at the same time, increasing our metabolism and burning more calories.

Nordic pole walking was first introduced in the early 1900's in Finland as a way for cross-country skiers to use their poles for training in the off-season. In 1997, a Finnish Nordic ski manufacturer, in collaboration with athletes and sports medicine experts, designed a fitness walking pole with an innovative wrist strap that allowed for a full range of upper body motion. Since then, Nordic pole walking has become the fastest growing lifestyle sport in Europe, to the extent that it has been introduced into the German health care system for its associated physical and health-related benefits.

Over 400 medical and scientific reports have studied the health benefits of regular Nordic pole walking which include:

- Nordic pole walking burns up to 46% more calories than walking without poles or moderate jogging, and increases up to 67% when pole walking uphill
- Less impact on hip, knee, and foot joints
- Helps to eliminate back, shoulder, and neck pain
- Improves endurance, mobility, posture, and bone density
- Enhances cardiovascular response and metabolism, and reduces high blood pressure
- Assists in lowering blood sugar levels in people with Type 2 Diabetes

- Increases production of “positive hormones”.

Klaus Schwanbeck, co-founder of Nordixx Canada, was instrumental in introducing Nordic walking to North America in 2010. Its popularity has since gained momentum, as people of all fitness levels embrace the concept of an efficient and low impact exercise program. Fitness events like the Times Colonist 10 K, held each spring in Victoria, are now including a Nordic pole walking section for participants.

Every year a growing number of residents in the Valley are discovering that Nordic walking is a fun, year-round, social activity - for people of all ages and all “walks” of life. Watch for upcoming introductory classes scheduled for the new year.

Catherine Egan, B.P.E., M.A., is a Nordixx Certified Pole Walking Instructor and distributor for Nordixx Walking Poles. Introductory and advanced technical classes are available through the Courtenay Recreation Association and NordicPoleWalkingComoxValley.com. Training programs for those interested in participating in 10K's, and other distances will be starting in January. Visit the website for more details. Email: cegan10@telus.net or cell: 250-897-0654.