

Health

MEDICINE | FITNESS | NUTRITION & ALTERNATIVES

DECONSTRUCTION

POLE POSITION

What's one part walking, one part cross-country skiing and one of the hottest new ways to blast a slew of calories? It's Nordic walking, a popular fitness activity in Europe that's quickly gaining momentum this side of the Atlantic. The whole-body walking workout involves using two ski-like poles to propel yourself along rural roads, urban pavement and nature trails.

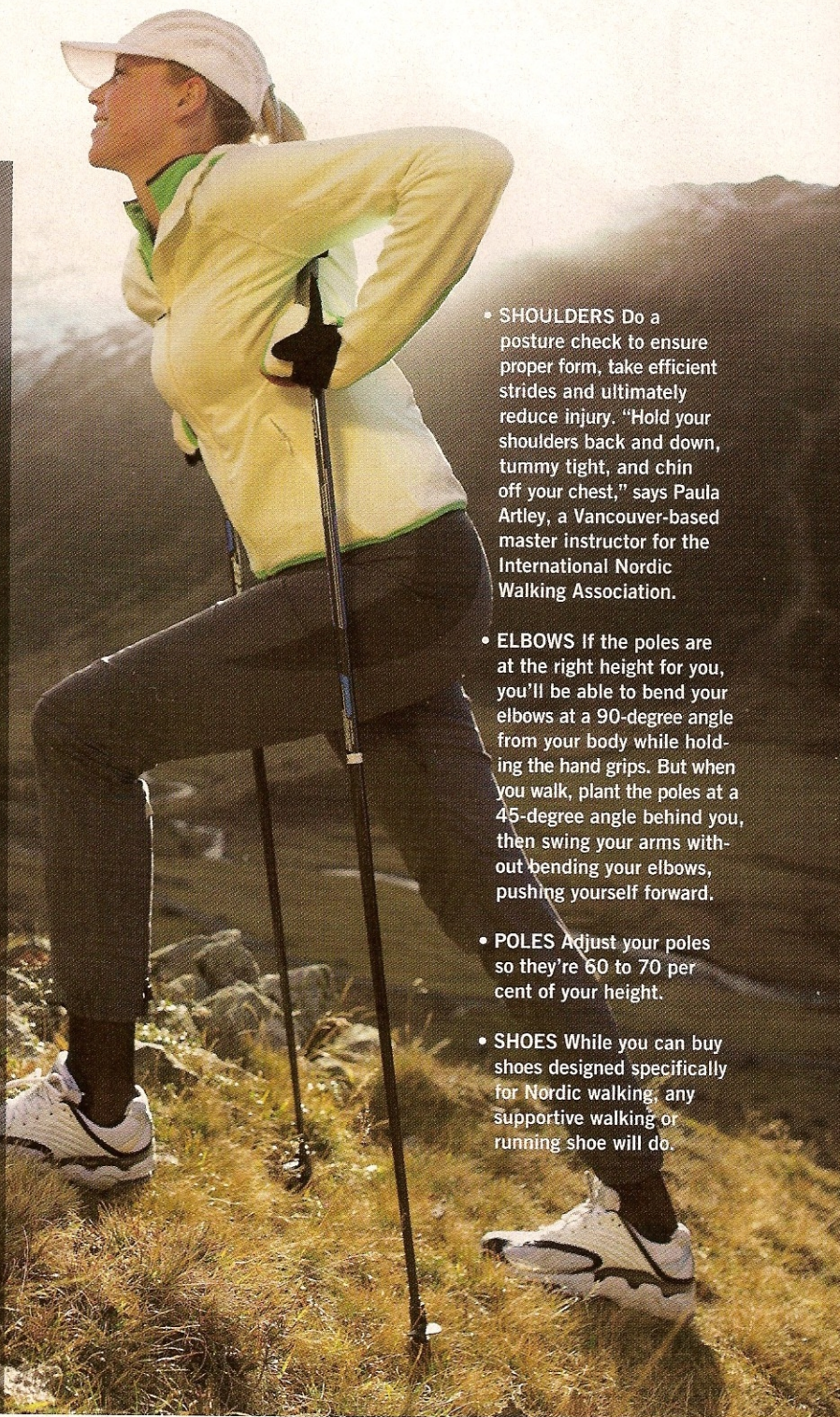
Less jarring on joints than running, Nordic walking targets almost every muscle in your body: your arms, shoulders and back in particular, says Joanne Younker, a ski and Nordic-walking instructor in Whistler, B.C. "I totally reshaped my upper body and gained better mobility in my spine after I started Nordic walking," she says.

Its calorie-zapping potential also outpaces regular walking. It burns about 20 per cent more calories than strolling sans poles, and – here's the best part – it doesn't feel more strenuous.

Before taking the plunge, a little instruction might be a good idea; search for a trainer online or at a local rec centre. Be prepared to pay \$10 to \$60 for a class or private session. As for the poles, they sell for \$70 to \$200 at sporting-goods stores. Then hit the slopes – er, streets. AMANDA VOGEL



For more expert tips, join the
Chatelaine Walking Club at
www.chatelaine.com/walkingclub.



- **SHOULDERS** Do a posture check to ensure proper form, take efficient strides and ultimately reduce injury. "Hold your shoulders back and down, tummy tight, and chin off your chest," says Paula Artley, a Vancouver-based master instructor for the International Nordic Walking Association.
- **ELBOWS** If the poles are at the right height for you, you'll be able to bend your elbows at a 90-degree angle from your body while holding the hand grips. But when you walk, plant the poles at a 45-degree angle behind you, then swing your arms without bending your elbows, pushing yourself forward.
- **POLES** Adjust your poles so they're 60 to 70 per cent of your height.
- **SHOES** While you can buy shoes designed specifically for Nordic walking, any supportive walking or running shoe will do.