

# NORDIC WALKING: Fitness for Every Body



**F**inally, a new fitness regimen that anyone, even the less-than-fit, can enjoy without hesitation or intimidation. Although the “silly factor” (i.e., walking down the street on a perfectly sunny day with two ski poles in hand) seemed to stunt the initial growth of Nordic walking when it was first promoted by several Northern European pole manufacturers in the 1990's, this very user-friendly workout has now become an international sensation. To give you an idea of just how big Nordic walking has

become, more than 10,000 instructors were certified by the International Nordic Walking Association by 2002, and current estimates of Nordic walkers in the United States range from 50,000 to several hundred thousand. (*The Wall Street Journal*, February 1, 2007)

Bernd Zimmerman, founder and Master Coach of the American Nordic Walking Association (ANWA), says that Nordic walking is a cross between cross-country skiing and fitness walking, and was originally developed so that cross-

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# Club Scene

country skiers could train in the off-season when there is very little snow. He believes the explosion in popularity of Nordic walking is due to several factors: you can do it year-round; it works for all ages and fitness levels; it has proven to be effective for weight loss; it's a total-body workout; it's low-impact and joint-friendly; and it's time-efficient and convenient. Almost sounds too good to be true, except that there is scientific research to support his claims.

The Cooper Institute in Dallas conducted a study in 2002 using 11 female and 11 male subjects that compared regular walking with Nordic walking. Nordic walking burned in excess of 400 calories per hour, compared to 280 calories per hour for regular walking. The study concluded that Nordic walking "caused a significant increase in oxygen use and caloric expenditure compared to regular walking, without significantly increasing perceived exertion."

Mr. Zimmerman calls regular walking "two-wheel drive" and Nordic walking "four-wheel drive" to help explain why Nordic walking is such an effective workout, but adds that learning proper technique is absolutely essential in order to gain the full benefit. "I can't emphasize enough the importance of proper instruction for having the expected results," he says with his very thick German accent. (He's good friends with Arnold Schwarzenegger and sounds a lot like him.) "I recommend at least five lessons with a certified instructor before you get started," Zimmerman said. He also produced the first instructional DVD on Nordic walking, which is also recommended.

Basic technique involves a heel-to-toe foot movement, a slight forward lean of the upper body, coordinating the forward foot with the opposite arm/pole (right foot forward, left pole forward; left foot forward, right pole forward, etc.) and squeezing the hand onto the forward pole as the tip presses into the ground, and then releasing the hand when the tip leaves the ground as the pole moves back. (Poles come equipped with adjustable straps that keep your pole properly attached to your hand as you release the grip.) Take longer-than-average strides, and with recommended variations (including interval training) you can increase the intensity to continue to achieve your target heart rate as your fitness level improves. There is also a warm-up and cool-down phase that includes various stretching exercises that utilize the poles.

Although you need just a few basics—poles, shoes and a heart rate monitor—proper gear is another essential. Poles range in price from \$35-\$200 and Zimmerman recommends getting good ones, which start at around \$100 and up, from name-brand manufacturers like Germany's LEKI, Finland's Exel Oyj, Norway's Swix Sport AS, and U.S.-based FITTREK and Exerstrider. Nordic walking sneakers are now being manufactured by Adidas, Reebok, Asics, New Balance and Timberland and average about \$100 a pair.

"Once you get into it and see how much fun you can have, you'll get hooked," says Zimmerman. "And, if you do

it just a half an hour a day, you'll also have a fantastic and efficient workout." He really does sound like Schwarzenegger, doesn't he? ■

*For more information, to find instructors and to purchase the DVD, go to [www.anwa.us](http://www.anwa.us), [www.zfit.com](http://www.zfit.com) and [www.nordicwalkingonline.com](http://www.nordicwalkingonline.com).*

