



your fitness
I DID IT

Winterize Your Walk

One writer discovered the joys of Nordic walking. Here's how to get hooked.

BY MEGAN MCMORRIS

I used to think that walking with poles on a flat surface—known as Nordic walking—was pretty silly. After all, do you really need poles to navigate flat terrain? But that was before I tried it. After 4 days of walking with poles, I was hooked. The poles eased the stress on my knees while allowing me to engage in a challenging, invigorating full-body workout. Nordic walking has easily catapulted my walking routine to a higher level and inspired me to walk more.

Nordic walking is a fun, easy way to ramp up your workout and boost your calorie burn. "It burns more calories than walking without poles," says Malin Svensson, a fitness coach based in Santa Barbara, California, president of Nordic Walking USA, and author of the forthcoming *Outdoor Adventures: Nordic Walking*. "Since you're utilizing more

POLING PLACES

Nordic walking can be done year-round, in any climate and on any surface—especially snow! The ideal setting is on level ground far from traffic. Try one of these:

- a high school track
- a golf course
- a path through a park
- neighborhood streets
- a level beach

muscles—your arms, shoulders, back, and chest and not just your legs—the heart has to pump more blood, which raises your heart rate and burns more calories."

If you've been thinking that your walk could use a little excitement or you just want to kick your workout up a notch, grab a set of poles and head outdoors. The reward? A whole new walking experience. Here's what you need to know to get started:

HOW TO STICK IT

Using Nordic poles may feel awkward at first, but it doesn't take long to get used to the motion. "I recommend that you drag the poles behind you at first; then gradually start using them to propel yourself forward," says Svensson.

STEP 1 At the height of your forward arm swing, when your arm is in a handshake position, plant the pole and push down on it as you stride. You should feel your body is propelled forward with every step.

STEP 2 Alternate sides, planting each pole in the ground as you naturally swing your arms.

What exactly is it? Nordic walking is done on a street, track, path, or any other flat surface. It's like cross-country skiing without the skis. In fact, the sport began in Finland as a summer training exercise for cross-country skiers. Nordic walking is different from trekking, which, much like downhill skiing, involves using poles to help maneuver up and down hills.

Who should try it? It's a perfect exercise for both beginners and advanced walkers. For beginners, especially for those carrying extra body weight, the poles can help ease strain on joints. Seasoned walkers will appreciate that the poles require them to engage the muscles in the upper body, effectively turning walking into a total-body workout.