

Boost your fitness using walking poles

Walking poles are designed to be used like cross-country ski poles. With each stride, you hold the pole at about a 45-degree angle and plant it to the side and slightly behind your foot. That helps to propel you forward as you push off.

Because of this cross-country skiing technique, walking with poles is often referred to as Nordic walking. Another common term is urban poling.

When walking with poles, your arms, upper body and core muscles are more engaged. That includes your abdominal, pelvic, and back muscles. When people use walking poles, they burn off 20% to 46% more calories. They use about 90% of the body's muscles.

Using walking poles regularly can build muscle strength and improve posture and balance. This improves your gait and reduces the risk of falls.

Another benefit of walking poles is that they reduce stress on hips, knees, and ankles. They also add stability when you're out walking on your favourite trails or routes, making it easier to go up and down hills.

Why walking is great for older adults

For most people, walking (with or without poles) is a safe activity helps strengthen bones and maintain healthy joints. Other health benefits may include:

- reduced risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, asthma, and certain cancers
- protective effect on brain function and reduced risk of developing dementia
- improvements in mood
- reduced fatigue.

If you have osteoarthritis, use a walker, or have other health conditions, talk to your doctor about developing a regular walking program. Ask if walking poles might work for you. A rehabilitation professional (such as a physiotherapist) can teach you how to use walking poles safely and effectively.



If you are getting your own poles a certified fitness or rehab professional can help you make the right choice.

Making it fun

Many people report that they are able to walk longer and faster when using walking poles. They also report that they are more motivated to stick to a walking program. Making walking a social activity is also a good motivator. Invite a friend along or join a Nordic walking group.

For comfort and safety, wear good walking shoes. Bring water and a healthy snack. Carry a map and cell phone. Then enjoy yourself!

Adapted with permission from
<https://www.alberta.ca/health.aspx>