

Excerpt

From *Nordic Walking*

What do the Poles Do?

If you still don't understand why people use poles while walking, do the following simple test. You need only a chair, a table, and two arms. Sit down on a chair by a table and place your right hand (in a fist) on the table. Place your left hand (flat) on your abdomen. Press the right fist down into the table and release. Repeat this action of press and release. What happens in the abdomen as you do this action? Yes, it activates. Move the left hand around to the chest, back, and back of the arms. The same thing happens with those muscles. This is why you use poles in Nordic walking: to engage the muscles in the upper body.

Imagine applying this pressure to the poles as you are walking. As you are using those poles, you realize that your speed has increased and that you are flying past people, even runners. Also, joints that might have hurt before suddenly get a break. The poles take the pressure off those aching joints. It's like walking with four legs. That's how humans started out on this earth—walking on all fours, which is the natural way. Through the process of human evolution, the long spine has caused so many problems. But with those two extra legs—two poles, that is—in the hands, you can now protect your spine from pain. The poles become an extension of the arms, so you can walk with four legs again. You will feel the difference. The second you place the poles on the ground, you improve the posture: You push away from gravity. Better posture resolves many problems: achy neck, shoulders, back, and hips.

Technique Tip

Plant and maintain the Nordic walking poles at an angle to propel the body forward. Trekking poles, in contrast, are mainly planted vertically to provide balance and support.

Instruction on using the poles is a necessary step in learning Nordic walking. After being strapped into the poles, most people place the poles in front for balance and support; some even point the ends forward like the heel of a foot that is engaged in walking.

Using the poles as trekking poles gives you support and balance. But using them as Nordic walking poles engages your upper body in the work. If you have ever tried using an elliptical trainer, you know how it engages the upper body. Although the movement is similar on an elliptical trainer and during Nordic walking, your upper body benefits more from Nordic walking. The poles are measured to match your height. The settings on an elliptical trainer cannot be changed regardless of whether you are 6 feet tall or 5 feet tall. On an elliptical trainer, the arms are bent the whole time, so you primarily work the muscles crossing the shoulder joint—that is, the chest and the back muscles. But the poles allow you to straighten the elbows behind you, thereby shaping the triceps (backs of your arms).

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