



Training to Trek – the safe and effective way

Nordic Walking provides a low impact, high results conditioning modality which reduces the risk of chronic injury.

Training for ultra walking events or treks requires intensity, regularity and a wise approach to injury prevention. All too many times do enthusiastic registrants set themselves the goal to complete the Oxfam 100km walk or do the Kokoda Trail and mid way through their training regime become struck down with acute or debilitating chronic injury. It may just be a sliding patella or a slight postural imbalance, however due to the demands of long distance training, repetitive stress occurs which can be enough to flare up any normally dormant biomechanical pre-disposition to injury.

So how can the necessary improvement of aerobic conditioning, muscular endurance and joint strength be achieved through long distance training without the risk of injury? Well the answer is two-fold. Firstly being screened by a trusted physiotherapist is strongly recommended, and in most cases a conditioning program to address any imbalances will be prescribed which should be adhered to and form part of a complete training program. Secondly, fitness modalities which produce the desired training effects but which don't add unnecessary stresses to the body should be performed. A holistic program should include cycling, swimming and the best form of weight bearing, skill-specific exercise which is Nordic Walking.

Why is Nordic Walking such a good training modality?

Nordic Walking is a form of fitness walking which utilises specially designed poles and a technique which mimics that of cross country skiing to create a total body workout. More specifically, Nordic Walking uses poles in a way that transforms them into a resistance exercise for the upper body whilst decreasing the load (thus impact and stress) to the lower body. As many more muscles are used, the exercise gives far greater aerobic fitness, body conditioning and weight loss benefits than what regular walking offers.

Scientific studies in Europe and the United States on Nordic Walking have proven that:

- Burns up to 40% more calories (NW consumes approximately 400 calories per hour compared with 280 calories per hour for normal walking)
- Gives up to 25% greater cardiovascular workout (NW increases heart rate by 5-17 beats per minute than that of normal walkers without poles)
- Activates 90% of the body's muscles including biceps, triceps, deltoids, pectoral muscles, abdominals, back muscles and glutes
- Decreases load and impact to the joints of the lower body
- Strengthens and tones the upper back, shoulders and arm muscles
- Develops core stability and strength
- Significantly increases lateral mobility of the neck and spine
- Releases pain and tension in the neck and shoulder region
- Improves co-ordination, stability and balance
- Promotes an upright and improved walking posture

Contrary to previous understanding as to what poles (aka ski or trekking poles) are traditionally used for, the Nordic Walking technique utilises poles to INTENSIFY a walking workout as opposed to just reducing stress on the knees. Due to this significant difference in purpose it is important to emphasise that Nordic Walking is a time-effective and ideal TRAINING modality but the technique should be adapted for the actual long distance walking event (where the aim is to conserve energy, minimise fatigue and maximise performance longevity).

Nordic Walking technique and equipment

Nordic Walking originated from Scandinavia (hence the name) and arose out of the need by elite cross country skiers to maintain their upper body fitness during the summer months. Without snow and skis they modified their upper body technique so that maximum fitness benefit was possible from a walking or jogging gait.

The resultant Nordic Walking technique involves a longer walking stride than normal and an alternate arm action where the pole is planted and then pushed down and back (this transfers power down the arm and through the pole to the ground in order to propel the person forward). A high or low intensity workout is determined by how strongly this pole action is performed. The upper body work can be as gentle as you want or as demanding as strong kayak paddling.

This may sound straight forward however the technique is surprisingly challenging to learn and takes quite a bit of practise to master in order to achieve maximum benefit. It is therefore recommended that proper tuition from a qualified instructor is sought from the beginning to ensure correct technique is acquired. Enrolling in a one off 'learn to' course, participating in regular group walks or having private lessons are the best options.

Once a sound basic technique is achieved, variations like up and downhill, striding, skating, jogging and double pole actions can be used to bring interest and extra challenge to any Nordic Walking session. There is a level of intensity and challenge to suit everyone and every training program.

Nordic Walking poles have a supportive hand-wrist strap to enable an effective push action behind the body and are also more comfortable when the poles are just used for trekking. For the potential gain and the fitness benefits on offer, Nordic Walking equipment is minimal and inexpensive - with poles ranging from \$120 to \$250. Anything under this price range should be regarded with caution, as with any product – you get what you pay for. When looking to purchase poles, strength and flexibility in the shaft, comfort and function of the strap and grip, durability of the metal and rubber tips and the overall swing-weight must be considered.

Utilise Nordic Walking in your next training program

It doesn't matter what sort of landscape or terrain is available, Nordic Walking can be performed anywhere and on any surface (from sand, gravel, grass, even to concrete footpaths). Additionally it is for anyone of any age or fitness level - so whether it is for your own training purposes or your clients, Nordic Walking provides a solution for achieving high fitness conditioning results whilst minimising the normal weight-bearing impact on the body.

As a certified Nordic Walking instructor you can join the growing number of PTs, exercise physiologists and fitness centres around Australia which are offering Nordic Walking classes and programs. There is after all, sound method in this previously seemed pole walking madness.

More Info

For more information about Nordic Walking or how to become a certified Nordic Walking Instructor (15 CECs) contact Nordic Academy.
Freecall 1300 791 740 or www.nordicacademy.com.au

Author Bio

Maree Farnsworth
B.AppSci (HM), NWO International Master Trainer, Founder Nordic Academy

Maree gained her Nordic Walking qualifications and experience in Europe and is the leading expert in Australasia. She is the Founder and National Training Manager of Nordic Academy - the recognised Nordic Walking authority and leading national provider of quality training, equipment and resources.