

SHED SOME FAT



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INSIDE

We serve up fresh fitness, health, nutrition, relationship, beauty and style advice for a happier you.

YOU CAN DO THIS NORDIC WALKING

Stick it

► Sarah Lang finds nordic walking's no walk in the park

"Look at the stick ladies, Mummy!" yells a small boy. He's referring not to the figures of the five women striding past – Victoria Beckhams we're not – but to the odd-looking poles swinging back and forth at our sides. Given the many curious looks and overheard quips, we know we look like skiers who've lost the snow.

Also known as pole-walking, ski-walking and nordic ski-walking, nordic walking has nothing to do with skis, snow or mountain hiking. It's simply walking with specially-designed poles. Curious about this increasingly popular activity, I did some detective work. I discovered it ticks the boxes for both aerobic intensity and total-body muscle toning. By applying force to

the poles with each stride, nordic walkers burn more kilojoules than they would by walking alone, and use 90 per cent of their body's muscles (versus 80 per cent for cycling, 70 per cent for running and 30 per cent for swimming). Inspired, I book myself in for a two-and-a-half-hour starter course with Nordic Walking NZ.

At Auckland's Cornwall Park I meet my fellow nordic walkers and veteran instructor Barbara Faust-Heffner: a matter-of-fact German fraulein who is our nordic walking master trainer.

It's not hard to work out which 4WD at the carpark is hers. Stacked with poles, backpacks and drink belts, her car boot is an Aladdin's cave of nordic walking gear. Barbara passes me a pair of >>



lightweight-yet-sturdy poles, which come with fingerless-glove-style handgrips, straps and "paws" (removable pole tips to banish the clinkety-clack sound on hard surfaces).

I strap my hands into the Velcro handgrip and pocket the paws, eager to get going.

But there's talking before walking, as Barbara briefly runs through nordic walking's history. Having begun in 1930s Finland as a summer-training exercise for cross-country skiers, nordic walking was launched as a fitness sport just a decade ago. Quickly taking off in Europe – particularly in Germany, which has more nordic walkers than New Zealand has people – it's one of the world's fastest-growing sports. In recent years the craze has spread to our part of the world, spawning numerous groups nationwide, with many more eager to learn.

To walk safely and effectively without strain, we first need to master the diagonal step, a basic technique. Barbara demonstrates. Looking straight ahead and leaning slightly forward, she points the poles backwards and starts walking. Once her right heel touches

the ground, she pushes forward with the ball of the foot and finally the toes. As her left foot strikes the ground, she simultaneously swings her right arm forward to plant the pole between front and back foot. Then she pushes the right pole out behind her. And so on, on infinite repeat. Arrrrgh: brain overload. But with body and poles swinging in perfect symmetry, Barbara makes it look easy. And really, how hard can pole-walking be? Um, a lot harder than it looks. Although I try to follow Barbara's lead, there's no fluid motion here, just awkward steps and jerky pole movements. I feel as silly as I look.

Thankfully Barbara's there to remind me to keep the poles close to my body, lean slightly forward, and relax my back and shoulders. Once I stop over-thinking things, I start to get into the swing of it.

Red-faced with a racing heart within minutes, I realise this is no easy workout. By slowing or hastening my stride I can alter my exertion level, but there's no stopping that burn in my arms. Usually their only workout is hovering over a keyboard, so it's no surprise

they're complaining. But judging by Barbara's taut triceps, I'm slowly turning flab into fab.

Time for a tea break, during which Barbara shows us our videotaped efforts. I hadn't even noticed the camera! Seeing myself onscreen makes it easier to understand where I can improve.

After some more practice, I've got the hang of it, announces Barbara. Yes! As I settle into a rhythm, a buzz of accomplishment spreads through me.

Once we've mastered the diagonal step, Barbara teaches us the one-two-step: so named because you simultaneously bring one foot and two poles to the front to strike the ground. The step, which comes more naturally to me than the diagonal step, is used to hike your heart rate or scale hills. We're doing both. By the top of the hill I'm beetroot-faced, dripping sweat, and my arms and legs are calling for mercy. Thankfully, Barbara calls it a day. After stretches, the poles double as massage sticks as we release tension in each other's shoulders.

As I get massaged, I'm feeling pretty virtuous. I've got my head round the basics and I've walked off that lunchtime chocolate brownie. And if this gym dropout can do it, anyone can. Nordic walking suits pretty much everyone: it's easy on the joints, fitness levels (you can set the pace) and the credit crunch – no gym APs necessary here, people! **WHI** Nordic Walking NZ's one-hour taster courses are run nationwide, and cost \$10; two-and-a-half-hour starter courses are \$60 and introductory six-class courses are \$100. See nordicwalkingnz.co.nz.

TECH SCHOOL

Move like a pro with these technique-perfecting tips*

- Look straight ahead
- Keep your shoulders relaxed and down
- Lean upper body slightly forward for balance
- Swing your arms and legs

- alternately; take longer strides than normal
- Plant poles at your sides, between front and back feet, and not too far from body
- Swing your arms to the

- front with a loose (but guiding) grip
- Point poles diagonally backwards at all times
- Push poles as far back as possible while releasing grip

WALK IT OFF

Several studies on nordic walking have shown that adding poles can make a big difference when it comes to fitness results. In fact, nordic-style striding can burn considerably more energy than a regular quick walk, according to Finnish researcher Raija Laukkanen. Here, how the numbers stack up:

	Kilojoules burned	Heart rate
Walking	310 kJ per 30 mins	122 bpm
Nordic walking	590 kJ per 30 mins	133 bpm

Pole power

Stuff to get your feet into and your hands onto before your stride session

Don't let unpredictable weather put you off. Throw on **The North Face Resolve** jacket, \$229 – it's lightweight, breathable and waterproof with sealed seams. It has a roll-down hood too, just in case it starts to bucket.



Your feet will thank you for these **Asics Gel Territory** shoes, \$250. Lined for dryness and suited to nordic's forceful strike, they've got a bounce-back sole and impact-reducing cushioning.



We'd never usually suggest the social suicide of a bum bag, but the **Deuter Nordic 200** drink belt, \$25, beats a bulky backpack, and has air cushions to prevent pockets of sweat and chafing.

Want to improve your technique by checking yourself out in real time? Take along the compact, weather-resistant **Kodak ZX1** handheld video camera, \$450. Awesome.



Match your sticks

A pole's a pole, right? Wrong. Wise up on super staffs here



Pack up the adjustable **Komperdell C3** poles, \$249, which feature a rubber grip release system to get your hands in and out. These babies weigh just 350g, so they won't slow you down. **Stick-y stuff**

Some poles are adjustable while others are fixed length – these Komperdell poles can be up to 125cm tall, but can fold down to a tiny 62cm to fit into your suitcase or backpack. Figure out what height your poles should be with this formula: Your height (in cm) multiplied by 0.68. Simple stuff.

The **Leki Instructor** poles, \$189, are an aluminium and carbon mix and have an easy-to-use trigger grip to release the gloves. **Stick-y stuff**

Poles usually come with detachable hand straps, which give you added control and are made of breathable material to prevent sweaty palms. The quick release system can be a trigger (like this one) or a rubber handle which releases so you can answer your phone with ease.

The **KV+ Vento** poles, \$179, are a great fixed-length option for the keen nordic walker. They feature a 20 per cent carbon mix in the shaft for a light, strong finish. **Stick-y stuff**

The paws on the base are removable, and come in hard and soft varieties – the hard pads last longer but don't give as good grip on surfaces, while the soft give much better grip but wear away quicker.

WALK THE TALK

Where to stride out across NZ no matter what the season brings

SPRING
HAGLEY PARK
They don't call Christchurch the garden city for nothing. Stop and literally smell the roses as you walk in this gorgeous 165ha park – an ideal spot for nordic walking beginners.

SUMMER
CORNWALL PARK, AUCKLAND
Get all *Pride and Prejudice* by taking a walk in our very own version of the English countryside. With loads of hills, trees, sheep and cows, you can check out a million different sights as you walk – just mind the sheep shit.

AUTUMN
PAKOWHAI COUNTRY PARK
Situated between Napier and Hastings, this park has paths and bridges that form an easy walking circuit (translate – a good Sunday morning option if you're feeling a little bleary from the night before) alongside both banks of the picturesque Raupare Stream.

WINTER
MOUNT COOK NATIONAL PARK
Get some metal "paws" for your poles (and possibly some ice grips for your shoes), and check out the scenery of Mt Cook at its best. There are plenty of flat options as well as hilly terrain, so you really don't have to be an aspiring Sir Ed to reign supreme!