

Nordic Pole Walking: Active Living for the Whole Family

by James Boyer, National Instructor for Nordic Pole Walking
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What is Nordic Pole Walking (NPW)? NPW is an effective, total body, wellness activity. People of all ages and ability levels easily can grasp the technique. If you can walk then you can do NPW—you don't have to be athletic to be successful. However, you should know that NPW is more effective than regular walking. It is a low-impact physical activity that improves aerobic fitness, and provides a total body workout. Done with the proper technique, you can walk with the certainty that you are burning calories, as you strengthen all body muscles with one exercise.

Nordic Pole Walking is new to the Canadian public but, millions of Europeans use NPW for health, fitness and social enjoyment. Statistics show that NPW is one of the fastest growing outdoor activities around the globe. Most importantly, NPW has been proven by world-wide scientific and clinical studies to deliver therapeutic benefits for various health issues and chronic diseases.

Why do kids need NPW? Our health costs have sky rocketed as many patients with preventable illnesses clog the system. Smoking, obesity, our sedentary lifestyle are all contributing factors. For the first time in our history, the younger generation will not be as healthy as previous generations. Our schools, faced with the crisis of our population's inactive lifestyle, wonder how to meet this challenge that has reached epidemic proportions. What can we do to develop an active lifestyle among our sedentary youth? NPW offers a simple answer to a big problem.

As a retired educator, I was really impressed by the way students took to the introduction of NPW at Atlantic View Elementary from NPW Instructor Bill VanGorder, and Principal Jim King. The administration and parents alike from Atlantic View should be congratulated for being forward thinking and innovative. They have set such a great example for our young families underscoring the principle—Active Living is a lifelong goal for all ages.

Where did Nordic Pole Walking Begin? Nordic Pole Walking was started in Finland about 20 years ago to help train cross-country skiers during the summer months. Cross-country skiers have the best balanced physical results over other athletes, but we can get the same benefits from NPW without being an athlete. Why leave these positive effects to a few athletes when everyone can participate, everywhere and anytime, indoors or outdoors, without skis or snow? Nordic Pole Walking is the answer.

NPW was brought to Canada by Dr. Klaus Schwanbeck a former decathlete and German Olympic Track and Field coach. He offers 25 years of experience in the field of health sports activity that anyone can do. Schwanbeck is available for Instructors Clinics here in the province.

Nordic Pole Walking Today. Currently, NPW is part of physical education programs in Germany and some parts of Ontario. As well as

being part of the German school system, health insurance companies there have subsidized the costs for NPW since 2003. Why would they subsidize the costs? Dr. Schwanbeck writes in his book, *The Ultimate Nordic Pole Walking Book*. "Low impact exercising is your best health insurance. Most sports activities work only 'half the body' like bicycle riding, walking or jogging. When using the Nordic Poles, you improve your cardiovascular system at the same time."

Here are four scientific facts that really got my attention. NPW burns 25 to 46 per cent more calories than regular walking because 90 per cent of your body muscles are used. Secondly, NPW has been proven to lower insulin levels and blood pressure. Thirdly, for people who have been diagnosed with Type 2 Diabetes—NPW can improve diabetes metabolism and reduce medication use drastically within three months. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it has been proven that

NPW can reduce high blood pressure drastically (by 18mmHg) within eight weeks, increase production of positive hormones and support stress management and improve mental health.

After spending time writing this article, here is one that applies to my situation - for those of us who spend too long hunched over a computer, NPW eliminates back, shoulder and neck pain, develops upright body posture, and has less impact on hip, knee and foot joints than jogging. Many common complaints can be alleviated with an easy and affordable fix—Nordic Pole Walking.

Where do we go from here? We have an opportunity for schools and communities to set a great example for active living. Why not get the whole family involved? Or, for 'Fun, Friendship and Fitness' take your existing walking group and turn it into a NPW Group. Either way it is a win-win situation.

For more Information on workshops for teachers, parents, or students contact James Boyer at edusports12@gmail.com or Bill VanGorder at bill@mrcassociates.ca . You may contact Dr. Klaus Schwanbeck at www.Nordixx.com

NPW is supported by health promoters like the Diabetes Association, Osteoporosis Canada, Retired Teachers of Canada, and major hospitals including Sunnybrook Hospital in Toronto.

All sources quoted: Dr. Klaus Schwanbeck, *The Ultimate Nordic Pole Walking Book*, Maidenhead: Meyer & Meyer Sport (UK) Ltd. 2009 ISBN 978-1-84126-355-7

The Early Intervention Program (EIP) invites NSTU members to sign up for our Wellness email list at Be_Well@nstu.ca . Please contact Erin at ekeefe@staff.nstu.ca to provide her with your NSTU email address.

