

A better way to walk?

Burn more calories with less effort? Bring it on. *By Bethany Lye*

I'd heard only good things about walking with Nordic poles—the most important being that it burns more calories and targets more muscles than regular walking, all while making your workout feel easier.

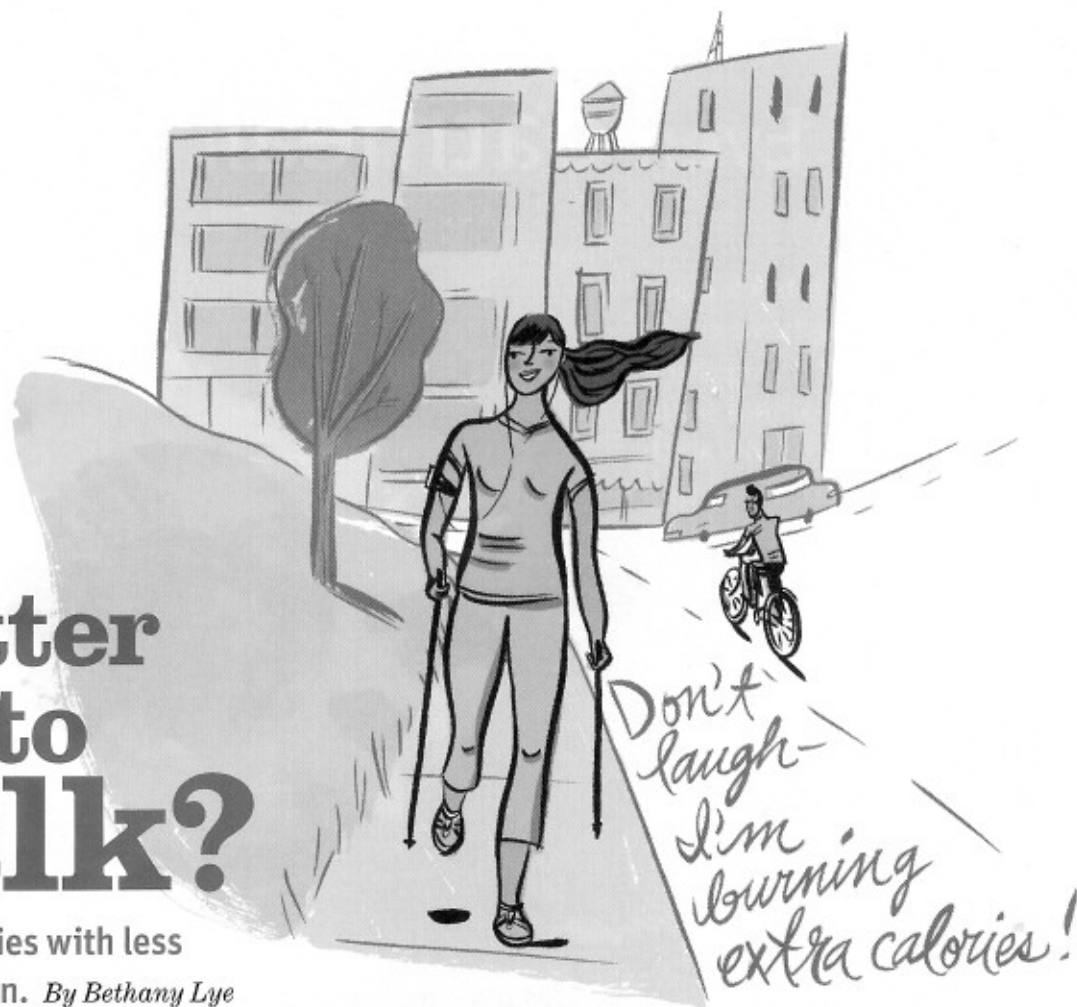
But now, in Central Park, just minutes into my first workout, there's a boy riding his bike and staring at me. Not that I can blame him. I look sort of like a cross-country skier without the skis or the snow. The boy pedals faster and flies by me only to brake for a second take. While trying to decide whether I'm indeed a confused skier or maybe an arthritic modern dancer, he nearly collides with

an older couple who seem equally perplexed by my presence. I can't help but wonder: Is all this attention really worth a sweet calorie burn?

My Nordic-walking lesson began with my instructor, exercise physiologist and nutritionist Martica Heaner, setting me straight on a couple of points. Walking, she assures me, can be much more than the leisurely stroll through the park I'd always thought it was. What's more, the poles aren't just pricey "walking sticks" (as I'd labeled them). Using them not only builds upper-body endurance but also increases your calorie burn 20 to 45 percent over regular walking. And they offer support that can

Walk it off—faster

A 150-pound woman burns 240 calories per hour when Nordic walking at a moderate pace (3 mph), and 360 calories at a brisk pace (4 mph). That's 20 to 45 percent more calories than regular walking burns at the same speed.



A better way to walk? continued

put less stress on your knees.

It takes a little practice before I'm able to see for myself what she means. First, I fully extend one arm ahead as I take a step with my opposite foot. My core twists as I plant my pole and push back, my back foot coming forward. Meanwhile, my other arm pushes the opposite pole past my hip and out behind my body, then sweeps it forward to keep pace with my feet.

"Lean forward from your ankles," Heaner instructs. "Don't bend at your waist." I lean forward and, of course, bend at my waist. I'm trying to keep the poles angled like I'm supposed to and can't seem to move my arms fast enough. It takes all my concentration to get my stride even semismooth.

After 10 minutes of practicing while Heaner tinkers with my posture ("head up," "don't grip the handles too tightly," "really engage your core"), my pace falls somewhere between a fast walk and a run—then, suddenly, everything clicks. I'm having a blast as I stride along, the poles adding powerful pep to my step.

I'm burning calories like mad, but the weird thing is I don't feel like I'm working hard at all.

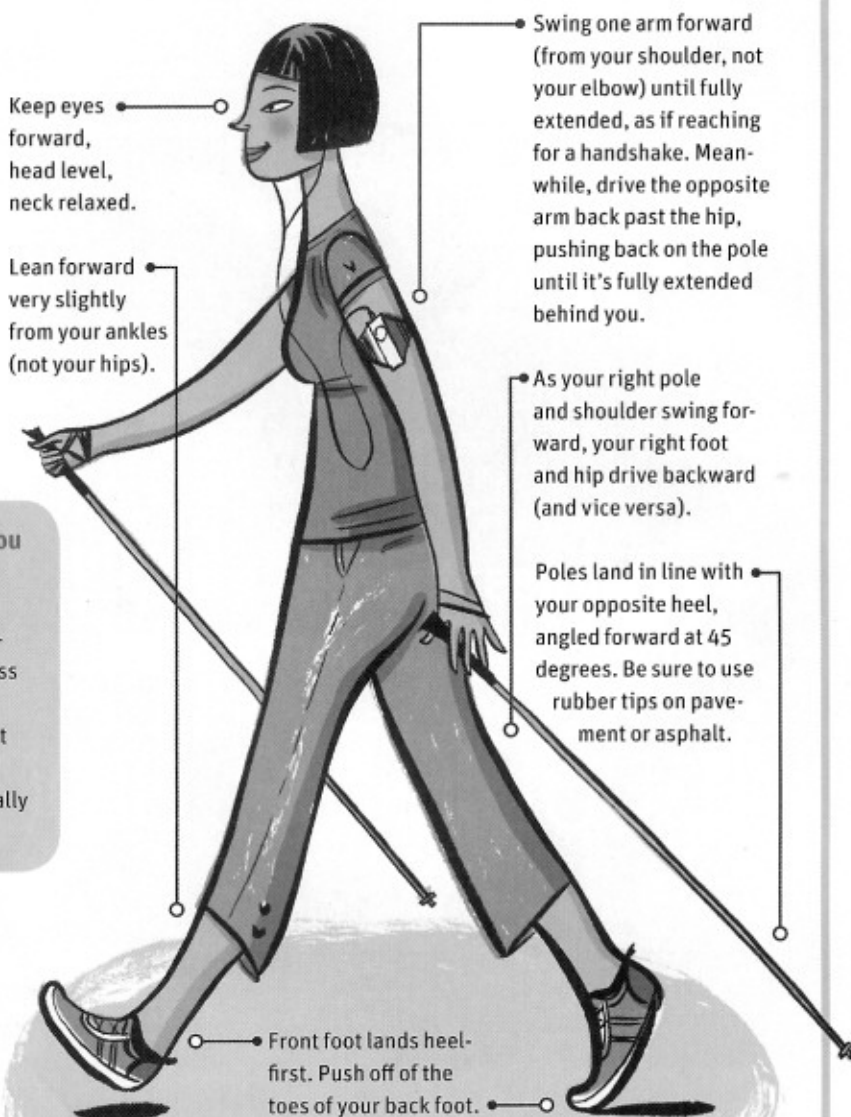
When the lesson ends, I'm sweaty and breathless, convinced that I've had a thorough workout. An old man on a nearby bench cranes his neck in my direction; he wants a closer look at my poles. I smile, unconcerned. It's hard to turn heads in New York—and I just can't wait to do it again. ☺

Freelance writer Bethany Lye gets a kick out of drawing attention while Nordic walking through the streets of New York.

Getting started

All you need to Nordic walk, other than your favorite pair of walking shoes, is a set of poles. They're lightweight, they have comfortable, easy-to-grip handles and removable rubber tips on the ends for cushioning, and they start at about \$80. Though the tech-

nique is easy to learn (see below for a simple crash course), an introductory lesson (around \$50) can go a long way toward helping you feel more confident. To buy poles or find an instructor, visit www.nordicwalker.com. You can also get poles at www.leki.com.



What's in it for you

Walking with poles builds upper-body strength and endurance, puts less stress on your knees, and makes your workout feel easier (even though you're actually working harder).