

I renewed my yearly gym pass in February and I've hauled my ass to class all of three times since then. Does this sound like you? The cacophony of agreement is overwhelming. If you get bored easily and are as lazy as me when it comes to physical activity, this might just be the thing for you. What if I told you you could lose weight and tone those nonexistent muscles just by doing what you do every day? Walking is probably the last thing you would think of to help get rid of those love handles but then again, you probably haven't heard of Nordic Walking.

Are you envisioning those people that walk madly past you on the seawall with their arms flinging all over the place? That's a whole other kind of walking. Nordic Walking, also referred to as Pole Walking or Ski Walking, is something that evolved, as you may have deduced by now, from cross-country skiing. In the mid 90's, competitive skiers in Finland were looking for a way to train in the summer season and realized that this type of exercise served their particular needs. Since then, its popularity has grown dramatically and millions of people all over the world have taken up the poles. The [Vancouver Sun Run](#) this year was the first Canadian road race to include Nordic Walking when they teamed up with [SportMedBC](#) and [Exel](#) to launch an InTraining Program with Nordic Walking clinics. North America is a little late in the game but then again, aren't we always behind Europe? (why IS that!). Here is Donna Hutchinson of On the Edge Fitness Educators with a quick 101 on Nordic Walking.

Anyone can take it up and I do mean anyone. It shouldn't surprise you to see an Olympic athlete pole walk in the same event as a seventy year old man. My fiancé's grandmother suffered from several unfortunate falls and had great difficulty walking but she's doing just fine now with a set of poles. I'm truly not joking. If you have an elderly friend or relative, this would make an ideal gift. You'll be surprised how empowering it will be for them.

Here are some of the benefits (please keep in mind though, that you need to do this regularly and about an hour each time, making sure you maintain a good pace):

- * You burn 28 - 46% more calories by using the poles. There are reports that state even higher numbers
- * It provides a full body workout and ensures every major muscle group in your body is evenly worked
- * It's a low impact sport so it's easy on the knees and other joints
- * A 13% increase in heart rate (5 - 17 beats per minute higher)
- * It reduces pain and tension in your neck, shoulders, and back. It also increases flexibility in those areas
- * You may not be able to do a sit-up but you'll look so sporty pole walking past all those hot dog eaters in English Bay!

No excuses here guys! I'm not saying don't go to Tim Horton's for that maple glazed donut. All I'm saying is maybe you should be pole walking there!

Donna Hutchinson

On the Edge Fitness Educators
North Vancouver, B.C.