

RACEWALKING:

Power Up Your Walking Workout

By Judy Heller

Racewalking is a sport for all ages and body types. It is an excellent cardiovascular fitness activity and an exciting competitive sport with Olympic status. The wonder of racewalking is it feels good and is fun. The reasons people get involved with racewalking: it maximizes the walking workout as it uses all the major muscle groups in the body, is challenging physically & mentally, can be done almost anywhere, anytime. With proper instruction the technique is relatively easy to learn subtleties and nuances of technique can provide for years of enjoyment and challenge. The technique comprises a rolling low impact movement that makes racewalking a safe, smooth, rhythmic and graceful forward progression. By harnessing the technique, you can walk faster than you ever thought with less chance of injury, than if you were running or even walking as you do now.

When compared to other physically demanding activities racewalking will:

- Be less injury prone
- Exercise more major muscle
- Strengthen bones & connective tissue
- Burn more calories
- Build upper body strength
- Promote muscular balance
- Increase muscle coordination
- Provide a greater challenge to mind & body

Whether you are exercising at home, at the gym or not at all, one thing's for sure: if you haven't tried racewalking now is the time to discover the technique that provides one of the best whole body exercises available.

Questions and misconceptions arise concerning the impact of racewalking on hips, knees and lower back by individuals lacking the knowledge of the proper racewalk technique.

“Does racewalking "force" the hip area to do something it is not supposed to do?”

James G. Garrick, M.D. author of Peak Condition refers to the hip as the most stable joint in the body. The joint is formed by the end of the femur, thigh bone, which inserts into the lower part of the pelvis. The pelvis is a bony ring-like structure to which is attached the muscles of the spine, abdomen, hip and thigh. The hip is designed for front-to-back, side-to-side, and rotational movements. The hip flexing extending front-to-back (not side-to-side or sashaying) movement is natural to the walking stride. Injuries involving the muscles & tendons surrounding the pelvis relate to improper technique.

“Isn't racewalking hard on the knees?”

During “bent knee” walk, the muscular structures of the legs and knees must bear the body's weight. As muscles tire, stability and endurance are affected. When the knee is straight, the body's weight is supported by the leg bones, the femur and tibia. In this position the knee is stabilized by the natural bony structure of the knee. This bony support leads to a stable, energy efficient walk. Straightening the knee does not mean forcing it back or “locking it”. The anatomy of the knee joint does not preclude straightening. Those who suggest racewalking is hard on the knee may be referring to forcing the knee straight when the supporting musculature has to

flexibility and strength, or in those with severe ligaments injury. Older walkers benefit from racewalking as it works limber tightened muscles & strengthen weak muscle surrounding the knee. Racewalking strengthens the supporting structure of the knee with its foot work. Fitness racewalking does not force any joint to do what it cannot do already; racewalking helps the joints become increasing functional by encouraging remedial exercises and use.

“What about the lower back?”

The standard treatment for lower back pain is to strength the abdominal and hip muscles and stretch lower back muscle Fitness racewalk technique encourages gentle hip movement and strengthens the abdominal muscles and gluteal muscle By encouraging a gentle natural hip movement, without the pounding or jarring incurred with other activities, fitness racewalking may benefit lower back pain.

The author thanks Dr. Ted Forcum, Back In Motion Chiropractic, for his technical review of racewalking biomechanics.