

Poles help rev up your walking routine

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They're called urban polers, and they walk among us. You've probably seen them, sauntering with what look like cross-country ski poles, only there's no snow or skis. It's called urban poling, and according to Lois Tomlinson, it can mean the difference between ordinary walking and a full-body workout.

"What happens is when you're walking, you use your lower body," says Tomlinson, an urban poling instructor. "When you add the poles, you bring your arms out." Urban poling, also known as Nordic walking, engages 90 per cent of the body's muscles and activates the core, back and triceps, Tomlinson says. According to Tomlinson, urban poling also leads to increased energy, improved posture, weight loss, muscle toning and reduced neck and back pain.



CREDIT: Larry Wright

Correct form is important if you want to get the maximum benefits out of Nordic walking.

But the trick is one must do it properly - and that's where Tomlinson steps in. The Vancouver resident runs Natural Trekking Tours, a business where she takes groups of people snowshoeing, hiking and walking with urban poles.

"My whole thing is: Get outside, get off of the sofa. It's easy," she says. Tomlinson is also one of many instructors across the country, trained by Urban Poling to be a certified instructor. Urban Poling is a North Vancouver-based business that distributes the specially designed poles, which have rubber tips on the end.

When walking with a marching motion, one must push the tips into the ground, Tomlinson says. The tips help with the absorb shock and stop the pole from sliding, while the handles are ergonomic and strapless. "A lot of people, when (they) start with them, they just start walking, ... but they don't use them correctly," she says, adding it's important not to bend the arms. "You actually need to have a certain format.

It usually takes people three or four times before they are comfortable with the format." Once people assume the right posture, they often find urban poling is much harder, she says. According to Tomlinson, urban poling is also great for people with sports injuries who are trying to get back into their activity, because it's a low-impact workout and the poles relieve pressure from the joints.

Tomlinson runs urban poling sessions around the Lower Mainland and is starting a new one in Burnaby. The clinic runs Saturdays, until Oct. 31 from 10 to 11 a.m. The group meets at Burnaby's SportMed, at 5901 Broadway.

Tomlinson usually takes people through parks, on streets and sometimes trails. Treks are typically an hour long, and people should wear walking shoes and comfortable clothing. Groups can range in size, from two to 10. The Burnaby classes cost \$55 for five sessions. The poles cost about \$100 and are available in SportMed and Pharmasave.

For more information or to sign up for walking sessions, call 604-990-7711 or visit www.urbanpoling.com.

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