

Nordic Walking

Nordic walking is a method of walking with poles and was introduced in Finland in the early 20th century. Nordic walking poles are different from regular walking poles due to their easy to use design, which includes wrist strips and enables the user to plant the poles behind them.

Nordic walking sessions are offered by a professionally trained instructor and the activity is promoted as a simple method for maintaining and improving physical health.

Specific to people with cancer, recent research has shown that pole walking may be beneficial for muscular shoulder function in breast cancer survivors. Nordic walking may improve upper arm and shoulder strength and is considered a safe form of physical activity for women with breast cancer-related lymphoedema in the arm.



Helping you live well.

Information on Nordic walking

This evidence based information sheet aims to provide clearly sourced and reliable information to help you make informed choices about Nordic walking, one of a range of complementary therapies available to support people with cancer. If you would like more information on how to access the range of services Penny Brohn Cancer Care provides, please contact our Helpline on 0845 123 23 10. We are able to provide our services free of charge, thanks to the charitable donations and voluntary contributions which fund our work.

Penny Brohn Cancer Care opinion

We support this therapy and include it as part of the Penny Brohn Whole Person Approach	We support this therapy, but do not offer it as part of the Penny Brohn Whole Person Approach	We do not support this therapy
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Practitioner perspective

"Nordic walking is just like ordinary walking except that you use two poles to help propel you forward. The poles support you, making it easier to go up and down hill and giving you good stability over uneven ground. They also engage your upper body; working more muscles and burning more calories than ordinary walking.

One of the key features of Nordic walking is that you plant the poles behind you, which keeps your posture upright and your chest open. This helps participants with their breathing. Due to the support given by the poles, Nordic walking is suitable for the whole range of fitness abilities. It is a safe, natural and suitable-for-all form of physical activity. It is social and it's outside, which helps to boost your mood."



More information: What is Nordic walking?

Nordic walking is a form of walking with specifically designed poles. It originated in Finland in the early 20th century, when cross country skiers started using their poles for out of season training when there was no snow. The activity was popularised in 1997, when special shock-absorbent poles with wrist straps were developed by a Finnish company, with help from athletes and scientific experts.

Nordic walking is now practised by millions of people, particularly throughout Europe. It is considered a simple, easily accessible, whole body exercise that can be shared by people of all ages and fitness levels.

The health benefits are said to be superior to those of ordinary walking, because the use of poles means the upper body and arms are also engaged. It is also a cardiorespiratory exercise, with the reported benefits of this kind of exercise including weight loss, stress reduction, increased energy, stronger bones, and reduced risk of cardiac disease and some cancers.

What happens in a Nordic walking session?

- Sessions may be individual and tailor-made or take place in a group. A session typically lasts between 40 minutes and two hours, including pole set-up and periods for warming up and cooling down.
- A qualified Nordic walking instructor will teach participants the correct Nordic walking technique, which can be tailored to accommodate their physical needs.
- Participants can take part in gentle walks or a faster paced workout walk. Other walks may place more emphasis on the location or social aspects of group Nordic walking.
- Once you have learnt the basic technique, you may choose to buy your own poles and go for a walk yourself.

What are the providers' claims?

(Please note that these are not the claims of Penny Brohn Cancer Care)

Practitioners claim that unlike regular walking without poles, Nordic walking is a full body workout that can 'burn up to 46% more calories' than regular walking, relieve postural tension, strengthen muscles and reduce joint strain. Cardio exercises in general are reported to lower a person's risk of chronic illnesses, such as diabetes, asthma, heart disease and some cancers.

What do people who have tried Nordic walking say about it?

Research studies known as qualitative studies ask people about their experiences.

They can tell us what having a therapy was like for the people involved in the study, but can't tell us if a therapy is likely to work for everyone (this is dealt with in the section "What is the evidence?").

We did not find any qualitative studies about Nordic walking for people with cancer.



Is Nordic walking safe?

Nordic walking is considered a safe activity and is suitable for people of all ages and levels of fitness. It is important to learn the correct technique from a qualified Nordic walking instructor, to avoid the risk of physical discomfort or injury. Medical conditions should be discussed with the instructor before attending a session.

How much does it cost?

Costs start from around £5 for short group sessions and up to £50 for one to one sessions and short courses. Taster sessions may be offered free of charge. Nordic walking poles are available from around £30. Weekly sessions are available free of charge at Penny Brohn.

Are there any legal issues?

Nordic Walking UK lists accredited instructors. Instructors will have completed a two day practical training course plus assessment, and will hold a minimum Level 2 fitness-based qualification. Instructors can also train with British Nordic Walking.

What is the evidence on Nordic walking?

There is some research evidence that suggests Nordic walking, or similar pole walking, is a safe form of rehabilitation for women with breast cancer-related lymphoedema in the arm and Nordic walking may improve arm strength. Pole walking may also benefit muscular shoulder function in breast cancer survivors. This is a summary of research findings. A full list of references and an extended summary of the research literature is available upon request from our Helpline.

Other sources of information

Organisations that offer support and information for people with cancer	More information on complementary therapies	Organisations that represent Nordic walking
Cancer Research UK Tel: 0808 800 4040 www.cancerresearchuk.org	NHS Evidence www.evidence.nhs.uk	Nordic Walking UK www.nordicwalking.co.uk Tel: 0845 260 9339
Macmillan Cancer Support Tel: 0808 808 0000 www.macmillan.org.uk	CAMLIS www.cam.nhs.uk	British Nordic Walking www.britishnordicwalking.org.uk Tel: 01446 773 876
NHS Direct Tel: 111 www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk		

Contact us:

Helpline **0845 123 23 10** (Weekdays 9.30am to 5.00pm, 24-hour answerphone)

Email: helpline@pennybrohn.org

Address: Penny Brohn Cancer Care, Chapel Pill Lane, Pill, Bristol, BS20 0HH

Statement

Our information and research is designed to help you make informed choices about the services that we provide. From time to time, for illustrative purposes, we may make reference to commonly available products (such as relaxation CDs and popular self-help books). We do not endorse or advertise the use of any specific product.

Disclaimer:

While we make every effort to use up-to-date and reliable sources, we cannot accept liability for errors in the sources that we use and also cannot guarantee to find all the information relevant to your enquiry or request. All responsibility for interpretation of and action upon that information rests with you. This information and advice is offered on the understanding that if you intend to support your treatment with complementary or alternative approaches then it is advisable to consult your medical team to ensure that they have a complete understanding of your situation and the complementary or alternative approach that you are considering.

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EBIS ID: Nordic walking EBISv2

Literature search completed: 07 2014

Sheet published: 08 2014

Review Date: 07 2016

With thanks to The James Tudor Foundation

