

The winter season is still ahead of us, but before going on ski trips it might be worth getting fit through Nordic walking, or hiking using specially designed poles. Nordic, or polar walking, originates in Finland. In the country of a thousand lakes, where days are shorter than nights for a considerable part of the year, Nordic walking is an ideal way to lift your mood.

You can see Nordic walkers in Warsaw in the Młociński and Kabacki forests, in the Royal Łazienki Park, and in forests around Józefów and Otwock. Nordic walking can be practiced anywhere and anytime.

Skiing without skis

Nordic walking was developed for professional skiers, who, outside the short winter season, have to prepare for competitions. It soon became clear that the long telescopic poles used in Nordic walking are not only useful for keeping your balance in the mountains, but also work on flat terrain. By using them, the skier exercises the whole body and reduces stresses on the body by 30 percent.

Research has revealed that while walking with poles on a flat surface, the weight on the legs, joints and spine is decreased by five kilograms 45 times a minute on average.

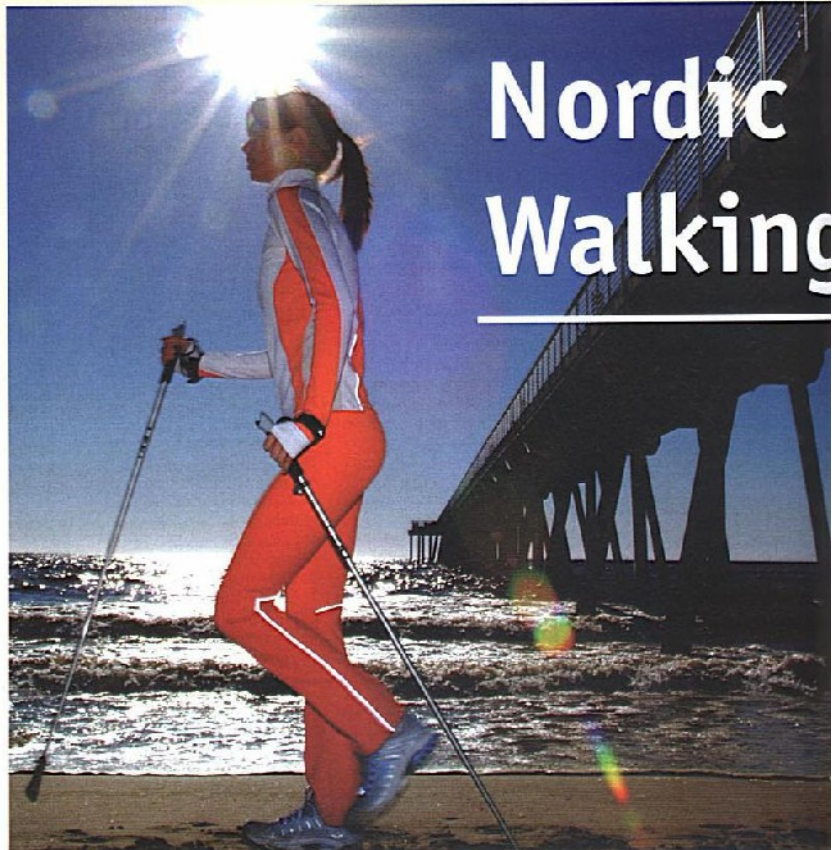
Why regular sticks are not enough

If, instead of professional Nordic walking poles, you used simple sticks picked up in a forest, your palms and forearms would start to vibrate during intensive exercise. The construction of Nordic walking poles is based on fiber technology, thanks to which the shocks that result from the contact between the poles and the ground are absorbed.

According to instructors of the First Polish Nordic Walking Foundation, using professional poles strengthens the extending and flexing muscles of the arm, as well as muscles in the abdomen, chest and back. It also considerably improves the lateral mobility of the neck and spine. Walking with poles supports the knees and makes the entire body more flexible. Nordic walking trains resilience, strength, mobility and coordination.

Technique and equipment

Nordic walking requires no specialist preparation or training, but it is worth completing a Nordic walking beginner's course organized by professional instructors. The basic elements can be mastered after just a few



hundred meters. The rule of walking with poles is: left leg, right hand. This means that the right pole touches the ground the moment you step down on your left foot, and vice versa. Naturally, you will also need comfortable trekking shoes and outdoor clothes for Nordic walking.

A beginner's course organized by the First Polish Nordic Foundation (www.nordic-walking.pl) costs zł.30 and lasts about three hours. Participants can register at: info@nordic-walking.pl. The Fundacja

Aktywni (www.nordicwalking.aktivpro.pl) conducts training series on selected weekdays in Warsaw's parks and forests, where you can watch walkers training and arrange a course with an instructor.

Professional Nordic walking poles from One Way and the LekiSport Nordic line are priced at zł.150-400 and available at www.sklep.aktivpro.pl. For poles from other firms, visit Sklep Podróżnika K1 in Warsaw, 8/10 Kaliska St., www.traveller.com.pl

Top Ice Skaters at Torwar

The European Figure Skating Championships 2007 will be held for the first time in Warsaw's Torwar arena Jan. 23-28. The organization of the event was entrusted to Warsaw in June 2004 at the International Skating Union (ISU) congress in Scheveningen in the Netherlands. The Polish capital has never before organized such an important skating event, although Poland was one of the organizers of the European Championships in 1908.

This year, 145 European skaters from 34 countries will compete. Poland will be represented by three pairs: Dorota Zagórska and Mariusz Studek, Dominika Piątkowska and Dmitri Chromin, and Aleksandra Kauc and Michał Zych.

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