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[Can a Walking Workout Really Be as Good or Better than Running?](#)

This is not really a trick question. The answer is simple. Any cardiovascular workout that gives you a higher heart rate for a longer period will burn more calories, thereby helping you lose weight and get fitter faster. So, yes, if you can keep your heart rate higher while walking than while running for a given amount of time, it will be a better workout. Everybody knows that running in general gives you a higher heart rate than walking so long as you're comparing the two on the same surface or unless you jog really slow and walk really fast... uphill.

Then I met Malin Svensson, a former national track and field athlete (one of Sweden's top five runners), and author of the book, "Nordic Walking" (Human Kinetics May 2009). Malin is a master Nordic Walking trainer who got hooked on the sport 10 years ago when she saw her heart rate was as high as when she was running! She said her body was working harder, but didn't feel like it was. She adds that, "Nordic Walking burns more calories, strengthens my upper body, and reduces stress on my joints. I get as good of a workout from Nordic Walking as if I'm running - and it is low impact!" That's one heck of a compelling testimonial! So I tried it. Malin gave me a quick lesson on technique. There are specially designed poles used for the sport that can adapt for various terrains. We walked uphill, downhill, on sand and on grass. After we warmed up and started up our first hill in Santa Monica, I noticed I was breathing very heavily. I tried to camouflage my huffing and puffing during our conversation. Don't get me wrong, that's not a bad thing.... That's awesome! I didn't have to look at my heart rate monitor to know I was working as hard as if I were jogging or running. But the poles take the stress off you lower body joints (hips, knees and ankles) so you don't feel the jarring you do when running.

Malin says knowing how to effectively use the poles and having proper Nordic Walking technique can make a big difference in how many calories you burn. Effective use of the poles

engages major muscles of the upper body and that helps raise your heart rate while also improving your upper body strength. Her book teaches you how to do this.

When Malin took me out for my Nordic Walking lesson, we decided to wear our Shape Ups shoes (the shoes with the rocker bottom) to make the uphill even a little bit harder. Malin says they intensify the workout in her core, butt and legs. How could I say no to that?

Nordic Walking hasn't really caught on in the U.S. yet although I hear it's huge in Europe. There are so many benefits to the sport. In addition to the extra calorie burn and the reduced strain on lower body joints, Nordic Walking according Malin's book, increases aerobic capacity and upper-body mobility, decreases neck and shoulder pain and stiffness and improves functional things like core stability and posture. The more I learn about the sport the more I wonder why it hasn't become mainstream activity here yet, especially in California. "People in SoCal have access to all kinds of surfaces and terrain -- sidewalks, sandy beaches, grassy parks and trails in the mountains. We have access to flat terrain as well as hilly terrain," Malin says. Plus, "using poles uphill correctly can increase the heart rate by 30 beats per minute!" And like I've been saying, increasing your heart rate increases your calorie expenditure.

If you've tried Nordic Walking before, I'd love to hear your comments, and if you haven't, tell me why. Just post a comment!

To take classes from certified Nordic Walking Instructors email: info@nordicwalkingna.com and/or visit www.NordicWalkingNA.com.

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