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Walking

What are the types of walking?

There are two types of formal walking: power-walking (also known as speed-walking) and racewalking. Both types require technique; the difference between them is that racewalking is an Olympic sport with rules and power-walking is done more recreationally. For example, there's a racewalking rule that the athlete's back toe cannot leave the ground until the heel of the front foot has touched. Both are excellent forms of exercise that yield fitness and health benefits.

Another type of walking requires no technique; you just get out there and walk. I call this the plain old walking technique, one step in front of the other! You've been doing it your entire life, and whether it's for exercise, a stroll, or walking the dog, there are lots of benefits to be gained from it. I encourage you to continue if that's what you do for exercise, but if you want to up the ante and start walking faster, then attention to your technique might be just the ticket.

Where can I find tips on walking techniques?

The technique for brisk walking, whether it's power- or racewalking, is the same. Below are some tips on technique.

Legwork

1. A common mistake for beginners when trying to walk fast is lengthening the stride (overstriding). Overstriding is biomechanically inefficient and can slow you down. It will burn more calories because it's inefficient (which might be a good thing), but you may burn fewer calories overall because you don't walk as far due to fatigue.
2. Instead of overstriding to walk faster, concentrate on a powerful push off while the front foot lands closer to the body. This is what elite walkers do.

Footwork

1. Walk heel to toe and not flatfooted to increase speed.
2. Contact the ground with your heel.
3. Roll the foot forward over the center of your foot.
4. Push off with your toes.

Hips

1. Rotate your hips forward and backward as you walk.
2. Your waist should twist. Racewalkers can look funny because of the hip rotation but restricted hip movement decreases your speed.

Torso

1. Keep your torso upright. Leaning forward or back will slow you down.

Arm work

1. Keep your elbows at 90 degrees.
2. Keep your hands relaxed.
3. Swing your arms forward and back and keep them close to your body. Your hands should not cross the midline of your body to maintain efficiency.
4. Speed up your arm swing to increase your speed and your legs will follow! This really works!

Head, neck, and shoulders

1. Keep your shoulders and neck relaxed. Head should be upright, eyes looking forward.