

Walking Poles: A Healthy Idea BUT.....WHAT ARE THOSE THINGS?



I went to a course offered by Elder College, North Shore, showing how to use WALKING POLES / NORDIC WALKING POLES / HIKING POLES / TREKKING POLES when walking so as not to seize up!

I use them regularly when I go for a walk longer than five or ten minutes. I like them a lot. Being in my late seventies (nature making itself felt, especially in my back and knees), I am told to keep moving. This is why I do Keep Well and Chair Yoga but there are many days when I need to push myself to go for a good 30 to 40 minute walk around my own neighbourhood. The poles make me stand up straighter, taking up to 30% pressure off my lower back and knees. I move my arms in a recommended manner so my shoulder and arm muscles get a bit of a work out too. I usually sleep better at night following a good walk.

Most poles can be used on pavement (little rubber boots plugged in to the bottom of the pole), on a forest floor or hiking on a soft surface (remove the little boots to use the metal points) and a round basket attachment (used much like ski poles but where there are a few inches of snow, sand or in areas of deeper grasses).

I attended two sessions recently on the North Shore at the OsteoArthritis Service Integration Service (OASIS) run by Vancouver Coastal Health. The first was Pole Walking, focusing on usage of the poles and how they keep our posture and joints

nimble. The Occupational Therapists teaching the course provided the poles for the class and a list of where to purchase them.

The second class was about pain we might suffer as we age with arthritis, old injuries acting up, post-surgical or accidental incidents causing pain in our joints. It also reviews the types of pain medications (to use without damaging our systems) and exercises to help keep joints from hurting so much.

Oasis offers a variety of classes at *no cost* to those with osteoarthritis or painful muscle and joint pain. No referral is needed to participate in these classes. They also offer, WITH A REFERRAL FROM YOUR FAMILY DOCTOR, consultations with a team involving a Doctor, Nurse and Physiotherapist for those who have certain special issues or those needing surgery.

Details with dates, times and locations for these classes are on their website at www.oasis.vch.ca It is required that you sign up by phone or email. They supply a lot of printed information but THERE ARE NO FEES.

Regarding the actual walking poles, there are a number of types and attachments offered at different prices (and often under different names). Some locations are:

Canadian Tire (\$39.99 to \$69.95); Costo (\$39+); Mountain Equipment Co-Op with a variety of prices (as above and up to \$200); Davies Home Health Care - (No price range but they offer a discount for OASIS clients); Most Health, Medical Equipment or Sporting Goods stores; and Urban Poling at www.urbanpoling.com 1-877-499-7999

An amusing situation arose after I had been using my poles for months. A neighbour was on her driveway and I stopped for a chat (while using my poles). She looked at me, then the poles, and asked if I was “embarrassed” using those things?



“Not in the least!” I responded. They work for me and I hope you will give them a try!

Submitted by Marsha Unheim