

Powerwalk to fitness...

By Carol Stewart-Kirkby

...with someone you love!

Walking itself is a great exercise because it's natural and safe, but if you want to challenge yourself a little more, try powerwalking.

One disadvantage of just walking, is that it doesn't involve aerobic activity, explained Stephen Powell, associate fitness director at the Guelph YM-YWCA. "The energy demands of walking are quite low. Aerobic training has several advantages. It helps to increase life span, diminish the chance of heart attack and burn fat," Mr. Powell said.

Powerwalking does involve a level of aerobics. It has been described as a progressive exercise program which can be started regardless of a person's level of fitness. It can be done by individuals, with a friend or in a group. It doesn't require any fancy equipment and can be done in a gym, in a park or on a concession.

Aerobics refers to the amount of oxygen which is being sent to the muscles. Powerwalking introduces aerobics by including arm motion as well as walking. "Most people, particularly overweight people, have poorly developed upper body muscle. Because they are overweight, their legs are strong from carrying the extra load every day. In powerwalking, we challenge the upper body muscles and that creates the aerobic training," Mr. Powell explained.

Mr. Powell suggested beginners walk briskly and swing their arms from the elbow only in an upward motion to the shoulder (bicep curl). The next step is to swing your full arm in a pendulum motion and the third would be to add weights to the end of your arms (either at the wrist or in your hands).

The best way to monitor how much oxygen is getting to your muscles is to keep track of your heart rate. Mr. Powell explained aerobic training occurs when your heart is beating at 60 per cent of its possible maximum. And here's how you figure it out. Subtract your age from 220 beats per minute to get your maximum. For instance if you are 50 years-old, your maximum would be 170. Sixty per



cent of that is 102 beats per minute or about 17 beats every 10 seconds. Mr. Powell recommends a 50 year-old, who has not participated in any physical training for a while, should aim for a minimum of 20 beats per 10 seconds and a maximum of 25. He suggested two fingers on the carotid artery in the side of your neck as the best place to take your pulse.

At the Guelph YM-YWCA, the powerwalkers walk to music. Mr. Powell said it is useful to find music with the tempo which will keep your heart rate at its desirable level and simply walk to the beat.

As you become fitter, you will have to walk faster for longer periods time and add weights. Mr. Powell suggested 1/2 pound weights in each hand to begin with. You can buy hand weights of that size, or you can make them by filling a pair of socks with lead shot or sand — that's what they do at the Y. The maximum weight you should

carry is 1 1/2 pounds in each hand. Mr. Powell strongly emphasized that weights should not be used around the ankle or the waist. He explained the ankle weights increase the impact the foot has on the ground and that can be damaging. Waist weights do not increase the aerobic activity.

Before you begin to powerwalk, it is important to warm-up. Five minutes of regular walking is a good all-round warm-up, said Mr. Powell. Or you can lean against the nearest wall, with one knee bent and the other leg straight to stretch the hamstrings and the calf. As well, shoulder rolls, stretching your arms across your chest and neck twists (not backwards though) are all good warm-ups.

The key to powerwalking is that you feel comfortable as you are doing it — no part of your body feels unduly stressed. Try it with a friend, now that the weather is good, and see how fit you can be.