

Nordic walking taking root in Japan

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Japan's newest fitness craze, Nordic walking, has onlookers puzzled as to why people are walking with ski poles when there is no snow.

Nordic walking just might be the exercise to solve the countries newest fear of "metabolic syndrome," which is excess fat around the mid-section that may cause diseases, the Japan Times reported.

The exercise originated in Finland in the early 1930s as a training method for cross-country skiers. It did not develop into what it is today until 1997 when Finnish sports equipment manufacturer Exel Oyj introduced specially made ski poles.

Using the poles burns about 400 calories an hour, compared with 280 calories for normal walking, said Exel.

The poles also encourage the user to take longer steps as well as lighten the load on joints, knees and other parts of the body.

"It's much more efficient for the upper part of the body," said Finnish counselor Liisa Karvinen. "After one hour, you'll get totally sweaty. You can get your pulse high enough to burn calories.

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