

You'd think that walking would be one of the most natural things the human body can do. But correct technique can reduce the chance of injuries and help you cover more ground in less time.

Even if you have no desire to become one of those hip-swinging competitive walkers, correct technique can make your walking more enjoyable and beneficial. Here are the most common walking errors.

1 Excessive backward or forward lean

These are very common faults especially with novice walkers and if not corrected, can lead to fatigue and poor form. Of the two, forward lean is especially common. Often the first indication that the walker is leaning too far forward is the presence of lower backache after a walk.

In order to get an idea of the correct posture to adopt while walking, try walking with a short pole held behind the back in the crook of the elbows. Or stand with your back against a wall. Then, lean forward very slightly from the ankles - not from the waist. This is the proper position. Notice how you feel when you lean forward from the waist, leaving your buttocks still in contact with the wall. This is definitely not the posture you want to be in while walking and will assuredly lead to backache and other injuries.

2 Arms held too high

This is a common problem that's easy to detect as the arms look stiff and tense, and tend to pump vigorously. Arms held too high will cause the elbows to be bent at greater than the 90-degree angle which is required, and will also cause the hands to move past the mid-chest 'nipple line'. High arms will also pull the body's centre of gravity upwards, leading to 'lifting', one of the two causes of disqualification in competitive walking. It will also lead to excessive fatigue in the arms and upper body.

3 Elbow whipping

Some novice walkers whip their elbows to such an extent that they emulate chickens vigorously flapping their wings. Remember that the arm swing must come from the shoulder, not the elbow. If this is your problem, you can learn to correct it by putting a long piece of string behind your neck, holding each of the ends in each hand and ensuring that your elbows are bent at the required 90 degrees. Now walk. If you feel that the string is sliding back and forth against your neck, and probably burning it at the same time, you are whipping your elbows. Practice until you have mastered the technique and eliminated the string burn behind your neck.

4 Overstriding

If you find that your hat or hair bobs up and down when you walk, chances are that you are overstriding and as such, setting yourself up for injuries, especially shin splints. Also, every time that your heel hits the ground in a stride that is too long, you are braking the forward motion and hampering your pace. In order to eliminate the bounce, experiment with shorter stride lengths until you find the correct one that causes you to glide or skim over the surface, rather than bounce and jerk.