



April 2009 News Flash

Spring into Action!

Walking as a Total Body Exercise

Spring is here, or at least according to the calendar, it is. If you live in the Pacific Northwest as I do, you are probably very confused because you woke up to snow this morning and the weatherman tells us more snow is on the way. This is hardly the ideal weather forecast for spring, or maybe Mother Nature is just playing an April fool's joke on us?!?! But let's be positive and think spring and exercise!

Walking outdoors can be a great spring exercise. It's invigorating and takes advantage of the beautiful change in scenery. Walking can be either a leisurely stroll or more of a full body exercise, that's aerobic, as well. One way to involve more movement as you walk is to incorporate arm pumping, which tones the muscles of the arms, shoulders, and back, as well as, adding a cardiovascular component.

Arm pumping is different from just swinging your arms because the arms move *briskly* forward and back. This takes much more muscle strength and control in your arms, chest and back, and actually is what propels your body forward.

The proper form for arm-pumping is with the elbow bent at a 90-degree angle, with the fist loosely closed. Move your arms forward and back so that they slightly brush

the sides of your body. The elbow should travel in a wide arc, coming to chest height in the front and almost shoulder height in the back. You can try practicing in front of a mirror to master the movement.

Since this type of walking involves a more vigorous movement in the shoulders, chest, and back, let's focus on some warm-up exercises for this area of the body. *Remember*, all of these warm-ups can be practiced in front of a mirror.

1. Stand in a relaxed position with your arms hanging loosely from your shoulders. Swing your arms forward and back to release any tension from your body. Next, transition to allow the momentum to swing one arm across and in front of your torso and the other arm towards the center of your back. Be sure to keep your shoulders relaxed emphasizing the rotation of your upper body from left to right.
2. Elbow lift. Place right hand on right shoulder, and completely relax the right arm in this position. Place the left hand under the right elbow and lift it toward the ceiling as high as possible. Stay within your comfort range. Then gently let right arm down. Repeat exercise with left arm. Repeat at least three times on each side alternating between each set.
3. Now with the hands still on both shoulders, bring elbows up to shoulder level and point them to the sides. Make small circles with your elbows pointing outward to the side, with both arms moving forward, up, then back, and down. Gradually make the circles as large as you can, staying in your comfort range.
4. Next, focus on swinging one arm at a time. With the right arm bent at a 90 degree angle and fist lightly closed (the arm pumping form described earlier). Swing the bent right arm forward and as high as is comfortable, then swing it down and back. Repeat the exercise with the other arm. Concentrate on how the movement feels. If you experience any discomfort modify your movement to stay within your comfort range.

5. Now it's time to put it all together. Assume the arm-pumping position with both arms. Swing bent arms (one arm forward and one arm back) in slow motion as you practice the arm-pumping walk. Exaggerate the slowness of the movement and remember to slightly brush the sides of your body as you pump the arms.

6. You're ready to pick up the pace and spring into action.

I hope these exercises make your next walking experience more productive and enjoyable. Don't forget to breathe deeply and expand your lungs with fresh air. Take advantage of the spring weather to get fit by walking!

Best wishes for your good health,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary Ann". The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent loop at the end of the name.

Mary Ann