



EXPERT TRAINING TIPS FROM PROVIDENCE SPORTS MEDICINE

Portland To Coast: Who's Ready to Walk?!

Walkers, now is the time for you to be thinking about 3 key questions: how many miles can you complete; how is your technique; and what is your speed? The focus of this article will be on improving both your technique and speed so that when you are celebrating at the beach your dancing legs don't let you down!

By now, you are thinking about how ready you are to complete the walk or the run. For many, this will be your first time...congratulations! For others, it's old hat, and you are not worried, or not worried much. Having been a participant in Portland to Coast for many years, sharing these tips comes from both my personal experience and my professional guidance. For several years, my "Disco Divas" team attempted to walk in costume, not worrying so much about time, but more about the highway dance routine. This brought us the Best Team Award and many great memories! For my previous team "We're Goin' In" (which I spent even more years on) the goal was to complete the PTC in one van with only an 8 person team. This accomplishment was much different, as technique and speed were very important to assure completion and to be pain free.

What Is Power Walking?

Early on in my HTC training I learned power walking technique, which is what I hope to share with you in these tips. Veteran power walkers can effortlessly walk a 11-12 minute mile but that pace should not be expected for beginners! Brisk walking pace will look different for everyone. If you are working on speed, find a way to time yourself to monitor your progress. A few simple technique changes can increase your speed and reduce your chance for injuries. Start training for speed in short distances, on level surfaces. When adrenalin is flowing during the race remembering these techniques will help you have a strong finish.

Posture Is First!

First, for all walkers, start with good upright posture. Keep your eyes up and avoid leaning forward. Upright posture reduces the strain on your back. If you feel yourself getting tired, concentrate on tucking your pelvis under your torso by tightening your stomach muscles, and/or lifting your rib cage as you walk.

Arms Speed Creates Your Pace

Swing those arms! For all walkers, your arms should swing comfortably, as they naturally pass back and forth. For power walking, keep your elbows at 90 degrees, and swing your arm back with purpose, and relax it forward. Work on swinging your arms faster as part of your training. Each time your arm passes forward, your opposite foot will move forward... the faster you move your arms, the faster you will walk! Keep your hands in a loose fist, remaining as relaxed as possible. When your hand comes forward, it shouldn't raise higher than your collarbone or cross the midline of your body.

Hip Swivel In The Mirror

With each step, your hip moves forward, allowing your leg to move with it. Hip motion and strength are both very important to stay injury free. To practice swiveling your hips, stand in front of a mirror with feet shoulder width apart and practice pumping your arms. You will see your opposite hip move forward right along with your arm. This motion is exactly what you want with walking, and you can practice by pumping your arms harder, right in front of your mirror! Not sure you are doing it? A selfie video can be very helpful for your training!

Heel Strike

At all times, in all walking, one foot must always touch the ground. Each step you take, land on your heel and roll forward, all the way through the big toe. While pushing off that toe, the opposite leg will be coming forward and land before you lose contact with your toe. Take shorter, faster strides to increase your speed. Overstriding will not create a faster pace, but will instead, increase your chances for injury.

As you master each week, concentrate on these few techniques to gain speed and prevent injuries. Progress gradually using these techniques, starting with just a block or two and work to keep a goal pace for a mile, and increase the distance as you go. And don't forget to have fun! See you at the beach!

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Author bio: Chris is the Director of Sports Medicine for Providence in Oregon and an avid walker, having completed 16 Portland to Coast Relays. As a physical therapist she brings clinical, technical, and personal experience to this article. Find these tips on Providence Sports Medicine.com

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