

## Books & DVDs

**Racewalk Like A Champion Technique, Training & History**, a DVD set by Jeff Salvage.

**The Complete Guide to Racewalking Technique and Training** by Dave McGovern

**The Complete Guide to Marathon Walking** by Dave McGovern

Available on the WEB at various places including Dave McGovern's Web:  
<http://racewalking.org>

## Shoes

Everyone has feet that behave a little differently, so finding the right shoe for you is an individual thing. Here are some guidelines.

You want a low heel. Much lower than an average running shoe. Race walking has much lower impact forces than running, so you don't need that bulky heel to absorb the force. Also, that high heel increases the pressures on the muscles in the front of the shin that keep your toes off the ground during the early part of the stride.

You want a shoe with a flexible forefoot. In particular, you want a shoes that bends where your forefoot bends.

You want a shoe the is big enough that your toes are at least a thumb width from the end of the shoe.

You want a shoe that lets you walk around the store on your heels. I know this sounds funny, but I've tried to race walk in a pair of shoes that didn't let me do that, and my feet kept flattening out onto the ground with this slap slap sound.

Your best selection will probably be found in a type of running shoe called a **road flat**.

If you have trouble, finding them or want to save some time searching, a local race walker, Gary Westlund - [GaryWestlund@aol.com](mailto:GaryWestlund@aol.com), offers experience in fitting shoes to race walkers and good deals.

# Race Walk 101

By Bruce Leasure, <http://twincitiesracewalkers.org>, April 2008

## The Definition of Race Walking

"Race Walking is a progression of steps so taken that the walker makes contact with the ground so that no visible (to the human eye) loss of contact occurs. The advancing leg must be straightened (i.e., not bent at the knee) from the moment of first contact with the ground until the leg is in the vertical upright position."

This means you have to appear to keep one shoe touching the ground all of the time, and that you may bend your knee only when the corresponding foot is in the air or behind you.

## Elements of Race Walking Style

**Key Point:** You walk faster by taking more steps per minute, not by taking longer steps. This is very counter intuitive. Elite race walkers take 200-240 steps per minute! Much of race walking style is there to allow you to reach a higher number of steps per minute.

**Posture:** stand erect - as vertical as you can figure out how to do. Don't throw your chest out like those pictures of army recruits at attention. Don't look down at the pavement with your head. Don't lean forward or backwards either. Rather, think of stretching up as if someone is measuring how tall you are and you need to be tall enough to go on that ride, and you are so close.

**The Stride & the Feet:** If you take a picture of a race walker from the side, at the instant that the front foot touches down, and draw a vertical line down through the center of the body, you will notice that no more than 30% of the distance between the toe of the trailing foot and the heel of the lead foot is in front of the body. While 70% or more is behind the body. Ordinary walking has almost 50% in front of the body.

By reducing the distance that the lead foot is in front of the body at the moment of foot-strike, you reduce the jar that the ankle, knee and hip joints feel, and you reduce the braking forces, and that lets you go faster.

To get to this 30/70 division, you will have to think of getting the lead foot on the ground sooner, and not reaching out in front of you to take that long stride.

**The Arms:** long pendulums swing slower than short pendulums. So, race walkers walk with bent arms, decreasing the length of the pendulum, allowing the arms to swing faster. Since the arm movement is synchronized with the movement of the legs, just like in running or walking, if you are able to swing your arms faster, you can take more steps per minute.

To determine that amount of bend you should have in your arms, stand erect, with your arms at your side. Slowly bring your hand up to your waist band by bending your elbow, while keeping your hand at your side. For women, when your thumb is about one inch below your waist, this is the amount of bend that your arm should have. For men, when your thumb is at your waist, this is the amount of bend that you should have.

**The Arm Swing:** When race walking, you keep the same amount of bend in the elbow joint. You don't straighten the elbow as the arm goes back and bend it again when it goes forward.

The arm swings back until the hand is near the back edge of the buttocks. The arm swings forward until the upper arm is vertical. The upper body may rotate slightly to enlarge the arm swing.

Try to swing the arms front and back, without any extra motion off to the side. If your elbows fly out to the side on the backward motion, or your hands cross your breastbone on the forward motion, you have too much side-to-side.

**The Legs & Knees:** While the rules of race walking only require that a leg be straight from the moment of impact until the leg is directly underneath you, modern race walking style keeps the leg straight until you are preparing to pick the foot off the ground. Keeping the leg straight longer allows you to more efficiently provide power from the hips, down the leg, into the heel, and then to the ground. This lets you move faster, with less effort.

When you get to the point in your stride when you want to pick up your trailing foot, you should vigorously drive that knee forward, bending the knee. The newly freed from the ground foot follows thru, fairly close to the ground, coming to full dorsiflex (unpointed) position just as the feet pass each other. The thigh of the free leg stops going forward, and begins to move backwards, and the free foot continues forward until the knee is straight, and all of that happens just before the free foot touches down.

**The Feet:** Think of your foot as a roller. You want to land on the heel, roll up the outside of your foot, and out the 4 smaller toes. OK, you will use your big toe too, but if you think of using your big toe, the odds are that you will transfer too much weight to the inside of your foot. You'll notice that the toes of your foot stay off the ground until your body is over your foot.

**The Hips:** The subtle side to side slink of the silver screen sex kitten from the 1940's is not the hip motion used by race walkers. A race walker moves the hips forward and back as well as up and down, but there is no side to side motion.

At the beginning, the motion of the hips seems very complicated. I recommend that a beginning race walker not spend too much time worrying about the hips. Rather think of standing tall, and even stretching up. This will make it easier for the hips to do the right thing, all on their own.

The forward and back motion mirrors the action of the legs. As the right leg moves forward, the right hip moves forward, so that the free foot does not get too far in front of the body. Correspondingly, as the left leg moves back, the left hip moves back too, adding energy through the standing leg, making you go faster.

The up and down motion also mirrors the action of the legs. As your feet get further apart, your body would normally have to go down, then as your straight leg came underneath your body, your body would go back up. Watch runners and walkers, and you will easily see this up-and-down action in their heads. A race walker absorbs this change in height by letting the hip of the standing leg be high, at the moment the body passes over the standing leg. Then, as the feet get further apart, that hip is slowly lowered until it is time for the other leg to be under straight and under the body.

## **Training Tips for the First Few Weeks**

Before you start trying to go faster, make sure that you are walking legally. It takes a few weeks to learn the technique and style of race walking. If you can get the legal technique down so you don't have to think about it too much, then you can start working on going faster. But remember, you have to go slow at first to learn legal technique.

It will take a while for your body to become used to race walking. Give it time to adjust by being sensible about the amount of race walking that you do. So, if you have a regular exercise routine that involves running or walking, do part of it as race walking. Start with segments that are no longer than a block long, interspersed with your regular activity. This help keep your concentration, and gives your body a chance to recover between those segments.

If you think you are legal, and you want to try going faster, pick out a landmark a short distance ahead of you, and try picking up the pace until you get there. Start with SHORT distances.