



Letty Kurucz (in pink), urban poling with some of the people in her walking class along Grenadier Pond in High Park, Toronto.

URBAN POLE ACHES AWAY

Urban poling can help your clients with aching joints get off the couch and back into action.

BY BARB GORMLEY

Letty Kurucz has always loved to walk, cycle, and dance. But three years ago, arthritis began rapidly creeping into her knees making almost any kind of exercise painful. “I felt like an old lady,” says the vivacious 40-year-old today, thinking back to the difficulties she experienced simply rising out of her chair at work. “The pain forces you to stop moving,” she says. “And when you stop moving, your joints stiffen.” As she became more inactive, Kurucz’s energy dropped and her weight soared.

In a search for activities that would keep her weight in check without aggravating her knees, Kurucz tried swimming, group exercise classes, and a circuit-style workout – but none of them were quite the right fit. When one day she noticed an upbeat group of women striding through her neighbourhood with walking poles, she immediately asked her orthopedic hip and knee surgeon for his input. “He said it would be a magnificent exercise choice for me,” says Kurucz. He was aware of the years of research behind walking poles and recommended that she find professional instruction.

Today, Kurucz is a poling devotee. “Every time I push off with the poles, it releases pressure on my knees,” she explains. “And focusing on the coordination and technique takes my mind away from them.” She is thrilled that she can keep up with friends in her 60-minute urban poling classes and proud to have walked off 30 pounds along the way.

Margaret Martin, an Ottawa-based physiotherapist, strength and condition-

ing specialist and certified urban poling instructor, suggests that knees feel happier while poling because the poles provide joint stability and create less shearing stress.

Kurucz’s arthritis is still a concern. But the urban poling, along with a minimal amount of pain medication from her orthopedic surgeon, has helped her regain her active lifestyle. How does she feel today? “Fantastic,” she enthuses. “It’s wonderful to move again.”

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What is urban poling?

“Think cross country skiing without the skis,” says Mandy Shintani, owner of Vancouver’s Urban Poling, a company that manufactures walking poles and certifies instructors. The two activities have a similar rhythm and both provide a complete, full-body workout.

“Just about everyone can do it,” explains Shintani, who is also an occupational therapist. “Fit people push off aggressively with the poles to get moving really fast, while people at lower fitness levels push with less force. People with knee and hip issues love that they’re off-loading weight into the poles, which lets them walk longer distances with less pain.”

