

arm forwards as left leg comes forwards, and vice versa. Your spine should twist minimally along its axis as it transmits forces along the body.

In the absence of that co-operation, walking appears a toilsome activity in which the torso is carried along as a burden. But when your whole body is involved, you look less like you are 'doing walking' and more as if you are engaged in a subtle dance.

STANDING START

They say you can't run before you can walk. Similarly, you can't walk before you can stand. Most of us have a sense of how competent we are at this, and we often refer to it as 'posture'. In reality, it's a much more dynamic activity than that word implies.

Our ways of standing and moving are usually lifelong habits, so it can be difficult to change them on our own. It's along the same lines as sinking into a bog and trying to lift yourself out by pulling your own collar.

My advice (because it worked for me) is to get some coaching from a professional. A teacher of the Alexander Technique will help you retrain your awareness and habits to ensure minimum effort and strain when standing and moving. In short, they could really help you to 'walk the walk'. ■

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GOING UP

Walking uphill obviously takes more energy than walking on the flat. But many hill walkers don't realise how much they are toiling, not just against gravity, but also against the body's own choreography.

Make the climb easier by doing what your body naturally prefers to do on the uphill. This means:

- **Take smaller paces** ie, a smaller horizontal distance between your footprints than when you walk on the flat.
- **Make smaller steps** ie, a smaller vertical distance, unless your plan for the day is to give

those thigh muscles a real battering!

- **Zigzag** to create an ascent that's less steep.
- **Get into a rhythm** Because your tendons and ligaments have built-in elasticity, walking at the right pace gives you energy for free.
- **Turn sideways on for tall steps** so you can use a slightly different, and fresher, set of muscles.

As you step up, put some weight through the heel so you're better balanced with less strain on that foot – literally more 'grounded'.

- **Breathe** Most people are limited by either their legs or their lungs. If it's your lungs, remember that the key to a full inhale is a full exhale.



COMING DOWN

Most hill walkers' key concern about walking downhill is how to do so while feeling the minimum amount of pain in the 'poor old knees'.

The more weight that you put through the knees, the more they are going to hurt. The second easiest way to lighten that burden is to carry less kit and use lightweight equipment.

The easiest way is to use trekking poles, which also improve your stability, significantly reducing the risk of an injury through twisting a leg on uneven ground.

Once you've got your poles, use that extra stability to walk a route that will be better for your body than just going straight downhill. Consider:

- **More small steps**, rather than fewer big ones.
- **Zigzagging** to create a more gradual descent.
- If you have to make a big step down, **turn sideways on** so you can help yourself by tilting your pelvis.
- It is easiest for your knees when they are transmitting weight vertically down to the feet. The further out to the side your knee is, the greater the forces become. So keep your knees on the straight and narrow and you won't put a foot wrong!