



INWA NORDIC WALKING COMPETITION RULES 2026

INWA Competition Values	1
 Contents	
1. Definition of Nordic Walking	2
2. Nordic Walking Competitions	2
3. Nordic Walking Technique	3
4. Race Entry	3
5. Age Categories	4
6. Nordic Walking Poles	4
7. Other Equipment	4
8. Withdrawal from an Event	5
9. Warnings and disqualification	5
10. Aid stations	7
11. Damaged poles	7
12. Protests	8
13. Safety	8
14. Health	8
15. Results	9

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INWA Competition Values

At INWA competitions, how you compete matters as much as where you finish. We believe in fair play, respect, and personal integrity — following the rules even when no one is watching, and treating fellow athletes, officials and volunteers with respect.

Every competitor should be able to stand on the podium — or walk away from the course — knowing they earned their result honestly, through skill, effort and sportsmanship.

These values protect not only the fairness of each race, but the reputation and future of Nordic Walking as a sport we can all be proud of.

Compete fairly. Respect others. Earn your result.

1. Definition of Nordic Walking

INWA's Nordic Walking is an intensification of regular walking thanks to the active use of a pair of specially designed Nordic Walking poles, whilst maintaining the characteristics of natural, bio-mechanically correct walking and appropriate posture. Therefore, whilst walking with the poles, a natural rhythm is experienced in the fluid movement of the arms and legs. Indeed, Nordic Walking involves the same 'opposite arm to leg' natural coordination of ordinary walking. The arms should never come further forward than they are in brisk walking without poles. During each forward step, the body experiences a pelvic rotation and opposite shoulder rotation; thus, the arms move alternately forward and backward.

Active and controlled trunk movements together with correct body alignment and core stability are important parts of Nordic Walking. It is important that the arm movement follows the rotation of the trunk, and the trunk rotation is a logical effect of the leg movement.

2. Nordic Walking Competitions

2.1. Nordic Walking competitions are sporting events. The goal is to preserve a good technique and gain the benefits of this activity through a competitive sporting experience. Nordic Walking competitions can become a motivation for regular Nordic Walking training, walking in the outdoors, enjoying nature, keeping an active lifestyle, and ultimately improving fitness and sport performance.

2.2. The competitions follow the INWA Competition Values.

2.3. Competitions can have individual and relay categories. In the relay, teams are made up of 4 individuals. The categories are established separately for each event by INWA and local organisations.

3. Nordic Walking Technique

To comply with INWA Race Nordic Walking rules, every participant must use the correct technique. The correct technique means that:

- 3.1. Running is forbidden anywhere during the competition.
- 3.2. The heel must contact the ground first on every step.
- 3.3. The arms and legs move alternately in a natural manner - opposite arm and leg movement.
- 3.4. At no point can both feet or both poles be off the ground at the same time.
- 3.5. The pole contacts the ground at the same time as the opposite heel.
- 3.6. The poles are placed parallel to the body between the toes of the front foot and the heel of the rear foot, except for ascending or descending steep rises or steps.
- 3.7. The centre of gravity is not abnormally lowered.
- 3.8. There is an active push through the poles to propel the body forward.
- 3.9. When pushing through the pole, there must be arm extension from the elbow joint without elevation of the shoulder girdle and the hand ends the push behind the hip.
- 3.10. The leading hand holding the grip of the pole passes the body line when placing the pole in front.
- 3.11. The poles are gripped when placing them on the ground and actively released when pushing with an open hand behind the hip.
- 3.12. Non-use of the poles by any participant is only allowed at the aid stations according to the specific course rules.
- 3.13. The correct walking technique must be maintained in specific areas, such as steep downhill, although local rule exceptions may apply for pole technique.
- 3.14. The participant is not allowed to block the path of other participants.

4. Race Entry

Race entry is open to all Nordic Walkers who have completed the required entry form and agreed to the organisers' terms and conditions. By doing so, they are confirming to the organisers that they are capable of completing the race distance in a reasonable time and they accept all liability for any injury, illness, loss or damage that they may suffer as a result of entering the race.

5. Age Categories

The following age categories shall apply to both men and women in individual races.
There are no age categories in the relay.

Age categories, 2026.

Male age group	Female age group	Age	Year of Birth
M Junior	W Junior	15 - 19	2007 - 2011
M Senior	W Senior	20 - 34	1992 -2006
M35	W35	35 - 39	1987 - 1991
M40	W40	40 - 44	1982 - 1986
M45	W45	45 - 49	1977 - 1981
M50	W50	50 - 54	1972 - 1976
M55	W55	55 - 59	1967 - 1971
M60	W60	60 - 64	1962 - 1966
M65	W65	65 - 69	1957 - 1961
M70	W70	70 +	< 1956

Note: You belong to M 50 even if you are age 49, if you are born 31.12.1976.

6. Nordic Walking Poles

Only specific Nordic Walking poles may be used in a competitive event. It is forbidden for the poles to contain spring devices or other mechanisms in order to influence the natural push-off movement of participants' arms. The length of the pole should be your height multiplied by 0.68 +/-10 cm. Measuring is done from the top of the grip to the end of the spike tip. The correct pole length may be verified after the finish line.

7. Other Equipment

7.1. Participants should wear the straps of the poles correctly.

7.2. Each participant wears their race numbers (provided by the organiser) correctly

on the chest.

7.3. Participants should dress appropriately so that judges can assess their Nordic Walking technique and footwear for the event.

7.4. Participants are not allowed to use earphones as they reduce the ability to hear directions from officials and other participants.

7.5. Participants are allowed to take electronic equipment, water containers, gels, and energy bars.

7.6. Communication by electronic equipment is prohibited among participants and referees, and the technical service of the competition.

8. Withdrawal from an Event

8.1. It is expected that all participants who enter an event have adequately prepared themselves to successfully complete the event. However, a participant may withdraw from an event if they suffer any medical complication or they believe that they cannot complete the event.

8.2. Any participant who withdraws shall advise or has to arrange to advise a Race Official that they are withdrawing.

8.3. Participants who withdraw shall be recorded in the Official Results as “DNF” (Did Not Finish).

9. Warnings and disqualification

The warning and disqualification system ensures that a competitor cannot be disqualified by the action of one sole Race Official. However, penalty time should be added for each Yellow card.

9.1. The Race Officials have the sole authority to determine the fairness or the unfairness of warnings and disqualifications, and their rulings thereon shall be final and without appeal.

9.1.1. The appointed Race Official shall elect a Chief Race Official (who has to be a certified National Nordic Walking Referee) who acts as the Recorder and should be the judge of the video in the finish area.

9.1.2. All Race Officials shall act in an individual capacity and decisions are made as seen by the human eye, except where the Video Assistant Referees (VAR) are set up on the race course.

9.1.3. Irrespective of the distance of the event there should be a minimum of 5 Race Officials.

9.1.4. All Race Officials operate independently and should not discuss the competition with others.

9.1.5. A Race Official can only show one yellow card per participant.

9.1.6. A Race Official should be clearly recognised by all participants.

9.2. A yellow card will be issued to participants when the participants:

9.2.1. Fail to comply with the Nordic Walking technique rules described at 3. by Race Officials directly.

9.2.2. Fail to comply with the Nordic Walking technique rules described at 3. on a VAR review confirmed by the Chief Race Official.

9.3. The participant will be penalised based on the distance if a yellow card is issued. The same penalty time will apply for a second yellow card. The penalty time will be added to the final finish time at the end of the competition.

Ind Races: Yellow card penalty times: 30 seconds for the 5km race, 1 minute for the 10km race, and 2 minutes for the 20km race.

Relay: Each participant of the teams competing in the 4 x 5km is subject to the same yellow card penalty time of 30 seconds per yellow card as above. i.e. if each member of the team receives two yellow cards on their leg of the race, the team will receive a total time penalty of 4 minutes.

9.4. A disqualification RED card will be issued to participants by Race Officials when the participant:

9.4.1. Fails to keep to the course.

9.4.2. Fails to follow the specific directions of a Race Official.

9.4.3. Verbally or physically abuses any official or other participant.

9.4.4. Behaves in a disorderly or inappropriate manner.

9.4.5. Has already been shown 2 yellow cards and breaks the rules for a third time. Three yellow cards equal a disqualifying red card. DSQ shall be shown in the final result. This same rule applies to the relay. If any member of the relay team receives 3 yellow cards and therefore a disqualifying red card, the entire team shall be disqualified.

9.5. Disqualification procedure:

9.5.1. All yellow and red cards must be immediately communicated to the participant. The appropriate card must be shown alongside the reason for the card being issued. Yellow and red cards must be marked in record sheets and communicated to the Chief Race Official who acts as Recorder in the race office.

9.5.2. When 3 yellow cards are issued, the red card as DSQ will be shown in the final result.

9.5.3. Disqualification is immediate where a participant is issued a red card.

9.5.4. Disqualified participants must immediately withdraw from the event.

9.5.5. The card issue, which is visible to participants, must be updated by the Chief Race Official in both provisional and official results.

9.6. A Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system is set up around the race course to check the techniques of participants.

10. Aid stations

10.1. There should be at least one aid station at the start/finish line. The stations must be marked and can be a maximum 40 meters long. Participants' coach or staff may help to provide their own drinks.

10.2. Aid stations are technique free zones except running remains forbidden.

11. Damaged poles

If a pole is damaged during the race the participant should continue observing all technical points outlined in point 3 if possible, until the nearest aid station where spare poles are located.

If this is not possible the participant should at least observe the technical points with the undamaged pole.

12. Protests

Written protests concerning the technique judgments must be made by the team representative or individual within 30 minutes after the last participant has finished the race. The protest is delivered to the Chief Race Official along with a protest fee of 100€. The protest fee will not be refunded regardless of whether the protest is upheld or rejected by the Chief Race Official.

13. Safety

13.1. All participants must be aware that the poles are not to be lifted in any other direction than that specified by the Nordic Walking technique, except at the water aid stations, according to the race rules.

13.2. If any participant has to remove the poles during the race, he/she must stop and do so at the side of the course.

13.3. Participants must leave sufficient space in between each other to avoid collisions, especially at the start, when overtaking, or when going through narrow timing points near the start/finish line.

14. Health

When participants register for the race(s), they are self-certifying to confirm that they are fit and well to take part in the race(s). All participants should carry their own insurance for any potential injuries and medical emergencies. The organiser cannot be held liable for any injuries or medical incidents.

Participants are responsible for their own health in Nordic Walking races.

They agree that they will NOT:

14.1. Participate if they are sick or do not feel well.

14.2. Risk their health if they are recovering from an injury.

14.3 Participate in Nordic Walking races with a full stomach.

Participants agree that they WILL:

- 14.4. Get a doctor's permission to participate if they have just recovered from any illness.
- 14.5. Consult a physician if they have diabetes, cardiovascular disease, or any other symptoms that may affect their physical performance and obtain confirmation that they are fit to compete.
- 14.6. Have all necessary medications with them for their race(s).
- 14.7. Report all injuries or people needing medical attention to the race organisation.
- 14.8. Call the local emergency number immediately to report any serious occurrences.

It is the participants' responsibility, and by entering the race(s) they agree to consume appropriate hydration and nutrition throughout their race(s). Drink stations are available at least one point in every race, and it is recommended that participants drink fluids at each available aid station.

15. Results

The event results will be published on INWA's website and social media.