

## Racewalk Speed, Strength and Technique Exercises and Drills

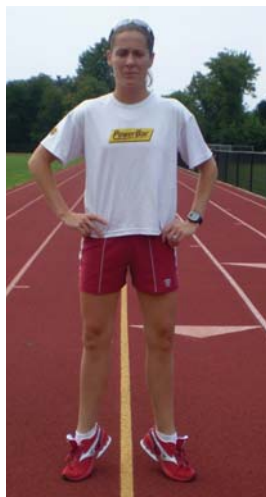
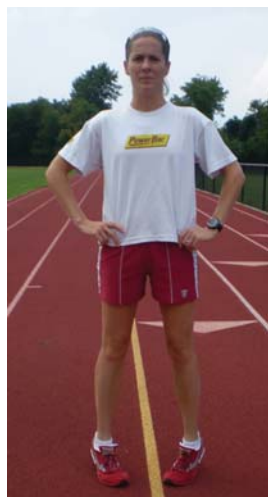
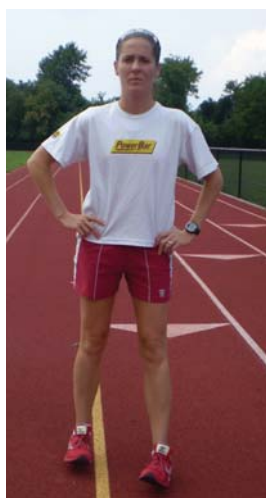
By Dave McGovern

To racewalk well requires strong and active feet, ankles, hip-flexors and core muscles. Unfortunately, most of us aren't born with these attributes. At my clinics I'll occasionally meet someone with beautiful racewalking technique who drives the advancing knee powerfully forward, rolls effortlessly from heel to toe and pushes off the tip of the toe behind the body at the end of a long, powerful



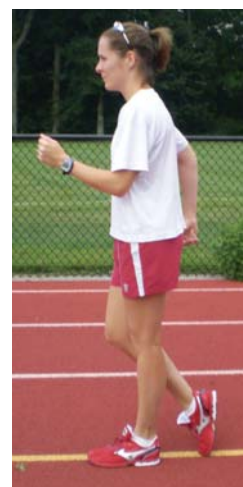
stride. Invariably, when quizzed, it turns out the walker has come from an athletic background. Basketball, soccer and volleyball players, runners and dancers all tend to have the lower leg and hip-flexor strength that makes great racewalkers.

But what happens if you don't? Are you predestined to a future of slow, stumpy technique? Of course not! You can make up lost ground by doing technique drills and exercises to strengthen these important racewalking muscles. If you haven't been using these muscles, start slowly. Add a few drills at a time, a few repetitions at a time, then see how you feel the next day or two before adding to your program. These are also great exercises to use as warm-ups for speed workouts.



**Heel walking and toe walking:** Walk on the heels with short steps, first with toes forward, then toes out, then toes in. Then walk on the toes, repeat with toes out, then toes in. Start with about 20 steps each and build to cover up to one lap on the track doing the drills.

**Quick steps:** Racewalk with very short and quick steps — one foot almost on top of the other. Be sure to pull the thigh all the way back so the knees fully straighten.



**Carioca or "grapevine" drill:** Cross one foot over the other while twisting the torso in the opposite direction, again and again, moving sideways down the track. Great for foot speed and strength, but also for strengthening many of the core support and propulsive muscles involved in racewalking.



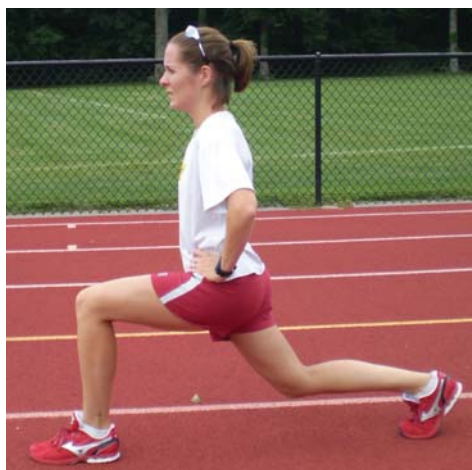
**Knee pumps:** While holding onto a fence or other sturdy support and keeping the back straight, extend the legs far behind the body keeping your weight on the balls of the feet. Pump the knees vigorously while rolling up to the toes. While doing so, pull the other thigh back so the knee fully straightens behind the body.



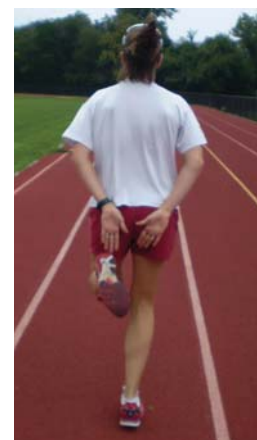
**Heel dips, toe dips/raises:** Standing on a step with your forefeet, let your heels dip below the plane of the step. Lift and raise your heels, alternating feet. For toe dips and raises stand with your heels on the step, then lift and lower the forefeet.



**Walking lunges:** Keeping the rear leg far behind the body, extend the front foot so the front knee stays over the ankle. Squat straight down with the torso erect. "Walk" forward, then squat down on the "new" front foot. Repeat to lunge forward down the track.



**Backward walking/backward running:** When running, start with shuffling steps, build towards long strides and high knees.



**Butt-kicks:** Run in place with a high back kick and a slight forward lean. Butt-kicks improve foot speed and strengthen the hamstrings.



**Step-ups:** (Above) Starting at the bottom of a flight of steps raise on foot one or two steps above the other foot. Quickly lift the rear foot one or two steps above the planted foot by driving the knee forward. Repeat several times before switching to the other leg.

**Power skipping:** (At right) Skip for height, then for distance. Focus on a strong push through the toes of the back foot, keeping the back leg as straight as possible.







**Superman:** Lying on your stomach, extend and lift one arm and the opposite leg. As a variation, lift both arms and both legs.

**Crunches, oblique crunches:** There are many variations on the abdominal crunch. Start on your back, tightening the lower abdominals to flattened the lower back and provide a "pelvic tilt." Lift the upper back straight off the ground — don't curl forward. Hold, then lower. Variations include oblique crunches (second photograph) and bicycle crunches to the center, and to the opposite knee (third photograph).



**Reverse crunch:** This is a bit of a variation on a reverse crunch. Start on your back with the legs elevated 6-8" off the ground. Curl up, pause, then shoot the legs upward, pause, then come back to the curl position, then to the start position. Repeat.



**Planks/side planks:** Resting on your elbows and toes, hold your body rigid like a plank of wood. Variations include lifting one leg straight off the ground. Side planks can be done by resting on the forearm with the elbow bent, or with the arm extended (right).

**Dave McGovern** has competed all over the world as a member of the U.S. National Racewalk Team, but he still enjoys using local road races to hone his skills. One of the coaches for the U.S. team at the 2008 World Cup in Cheboksary, Russia, Dave has coached both elite and novice walkers to excel in competitions near and far. Visit his web site at [www.racewalking.org](http://www.racewalking.org).