

Cycling and disease prevention

To be fit and healthy you need to be physically active. Regular physical activity can help protect you from serious diseases like obesity, heart disease, cancer, mental illness, diabetes and arthritis. Riding your bike regularly is one of the best ways to tackle the health problems associated with a sedentary lifestyle.

Cycling is a great way to exercise and achieve healthy levels of fitness and activity. Cycling is also fun, cheap and good for the environment. Using your bike to get around is a great way to stay active as part of your everyday activities. Cycling is a healthy, low impact exercise that can be enjoyed by people of all ages, from young children to older adults.

Cycling is a good way to get fit

It only takes two to four hours a week to achieve a general improvement to your health. Cycling is:

- **Low impact** - it causes less strain and injuries than some other fitness exercises.
- **A good muscle workout** - cycling uses all of the major muscle groups as you pedal. Cycling has been shown to get you more fit than walking as you tend to get your heart rate up to a speed where it improves your health more easily.
- **Easy** - unlike some other sports, cycling does not require high levels of physical skills. Most people know how to ride a bike and, once you learn, you don't forget.
- **Good for strength and stamina** - cycling increases stamina, strength and aerobic fitness.
- **As intense as you want** - cycling can be done at very low intensity to begin with, if recovering from injury or illness, but can be built up to a demanding physical workout.
- **A fun way to get fit** - cycling is fun. The adventure and buzz you get from coasting down hills and being outdoors means you are more likely to continue to cycle regularly compared to other physical activities that keep you indoors or require special times or places.

Obesity and weight control

Cycling is a good way to control your weight or reduce weight as it raises your metabolic rate, builds muscle and burns body fat. If you're trying to lose weight, cycling must be combined with a healthy eating plan. Cycling is a good exercise for weight reduction because it:

- Is a comfortable form of exercise
- Is relatively safe compared to other sports
- Can vary in time and intensity - it can be built up slowly and varied to suit each individual.

Research suggests you should be burning up at least 8,400 kilojoules (approx 2,000 calories) a week through exercise. Steady cycling burns about 1,200 kilojoules (approx 300 calories) per hour. If you cycle twice a day, the kilojoules burnt soon add up. British research shows that a half-hour bike ride every day will burn nearly five kilograms of fat over a year.

Cardiovascular disease

A healthy heart reduces the risk of cardiovascular diseases. Cardiovascular diseases include stroke, high blood pressure and heart attack. Regular cycling stimulates and improves your heart, lungs and circulation. Your heart muscles are strengthened, resting pulse is lowered and blood fat levels reduced. Research also shows that there is often up to two to three times less exposure to pollution if riding to work by bike rather than travelling by car. So stress on lung function is reduced if you cycle.

Cancer

There have been many studies conducted on the relationship between exercise and cancer, especially colon and breast cancer. Research has shown that if you cycle, the chance of bowel cancer may be reduced. There is limited evidence to suggest that regular cycling will reduce the risk of breast cancer.

Diabetes

The rate of diabetes type 2 is increasing and is a serious public health concern. Lack of physical activity is thought to be a major reason why people develop this condition. Research over 12 years, involving 21,000 people in Finland, found that people who cycled for more than 30 minutes per day had a 40 per cent lower risk of developing diabetes.

Bone injuries and arthritis

Cycling improves strength, balance and coordination. It may also help to prevent falls and fractures. Riding a bike is an ideal form of exercise if you have osteoarthritis because it is a low impact exercise that places little stress on joints. Cycling does not specifically help osteoporosis (bone thinning disease) because it is not a weight bearing exercise.

Mental illnesses

Mental health conditions like depression, stress and anxiety can be reduced by regular bike riding. This is due to the effects of the exercise itself and because of the enjoyment that riding a bike can bring.

Benefits of cycling to work

Cycling to work is a good way to fit regular exercise into your daily exercise routine. Research shows that riding to work has health benefits. A heart study conducted in Denmark found that regular cycling protected people from heart disease.

The study was conducted over 14 years with 30,000 people aged 20 to 93 years. Those who did not cycle to work experienced a 39 per cent higher mortality (death) rate than those who did. Another study conducted in South Africa shows that cycling to work caused enough stimulation to the cardiovascular system to produce acceptable standards of physical fitness.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Bicycle Victoria Tel. 1800 639 634, www.bv.com.au

Things to remember

- Cycling can help to protect you from serious diseases like stroke, heart attack, some cancers, depression, diabetes, obesity and arthritis.
- Riding a bike is healthy, fun and a low impact form of exercise.
- People of all ages and fitness levels can get fit and enjoy cycling.
- Cycling is easy to fit into your daily routine by riding to the shops, park, school or work.

Want to know more?

For references, related links and support group information, go to [More information](#).

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Bicycle Victoria

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