



Cycling for Fitness



Cycling can save you money, improve your health and help you enjoy the outdoors. Regular cycling will:

- make you feel more energetic
- help you sleep better
- reduce stress
- strengthen your heart
- improve your blood pressure
- help you manage your weight

Unlike going to the gym, cycling is a relatively inexpensive way to achieve better health and fitness. You can also save money by cycling to and from work, to the shops or to school.

Recommendations for Physical Activity

The National Heart Foundation of Australia recommends 30 minutes of moderate physical activity each day.

Thirty minutes might sound like a lot of exercise to do all in one go but the great news is that you can break it up throughout the day. This means that you could choose to exercise for ten minutes three times a day, or 15 minutes twice a day and you will still benefit.

To get the most out of cycling, try to go at a pace that makes you breathe a little faster, feel warmer and have a slightly raised heart beat. Don't overdo it though as you should be able to talk while cycling. Remember that it is important to take it easy to begin with. When you first start cycling you should aim to cover five kilometers in 20 minutes. As you start to become fitter and more comfortable on your bike you can then start to increase your speed and distance.

Why Cycle for Fitness?

There will be different reasons for different people. It may be that you want to lose some weight, or just to tone up, or it may be that you are recovering from an injury. The view is that if you can walk briskly for 10 minutes then you can usually cycle for an hour.

The low-impact nature of cycling means it places very little strain on the body. This is great news for people who are starting to get into exercise, for pregnant women and for people

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recovering from injury. Cycling also gives a great cardiovascular workout because it uses the biggest muscles in the body.

Being fit helps you cope with the everyday challenges of life whether this be from running to the bus to working in the garden. You can decrease the risk of many of today's lifestyle diseases such as cardiovascular disease by being fit. Fitness is always a fantastic way of helping you to cope with stress. 'Feel good' body chemicals called 'endorphins' are released during exercise. As well as getting you fit, cycling will get you out in the fresh air which will also help to combat any stresses you might be going through.

About Doing It

To get on the way to fitness and health, try to do some enjoyable exercise most days of the week. Make sure that you before you start an exercise program that you get the all clear from your doctor. This is especially important if you are overweight, smoke, or have high blood pressure. Your doctor will advise you on your heartbeat rate and how high it can go safely when exercising. Before setting off on your ride don't forget to check your bicycle is in order and safe for you to ride. See our sheet **Bicycle Maintenance** for tips on what to check. Also, don't forget to take water with you for your ride.

Your Cycling Fitness Program

As with any exercise, it is important to warm up before cycling by doing some warm ups. Gentle cycling for ten minutes will warm your body up and prepare your muscles for more intense exercise.

Increase the speed and distance you cycle at a steady rate as you get fitter. Remember that you are exercising not only for good health but enjoyment so don't exert yourself too hard that you see it as a chore. A general guideline is that a beginner who has a moderate level of fitness should look to cover 5 kilometers comfortably in 20 minutes.

Rest is also very important as it allows your body to recover. Even top athletes do not exceed six training sessions a week. It is equally important that you allow a cooling down period after a ride. Do this by finishing the last minutes at an easy pace, allowing your muscles to relax. By doing this you will finish refreshed and re-vitalized, which was the aim at the start of your ride, rather than strained and tired.

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