



Cycling – A Great New Years' Resolution



The start of a new year is an ideal time for making a promise to yourself to get fit and to lose some weight.

A lot of us will start off the year signing up to an expensive gym membership, attending a boot camp or buying some sort of aerobic contraption with every good intention of using this regularly at home. Unfortunately these solutions seem to quickly lose their appeal not long into January and are either put on hold or left to gather dust in the corner.

There is an easy alternative that is suitable for just about everyone. Your best chance of achieving a fitness and / or weight loss goal is actually the humble bicycle.

Taking up cycling will not require a huge change to your lifestyle. Simply riding to work a couple of days a week or down to the shops can make a big difference to your wellbeing. By substituting your bicycle for the car, you will also save on fuel and maintenance costs. There are not many other fitness or weight-loss methods that will actually make you money!

Age is not a barrier because cycling is low impact in nature and, therefore, places less stress on joints than other forms of exercise such as jogging.

As an example, for every kilometer of moderate cycling completed, a person weighing 70 kg can expect to burn about 35 calories or 150 kilojoules. That means for an 8 km bike ride taking about 20 minutes will use the equivalent energy contained in a chicken and salad sandwich. On this basis, a 15 km ride will burn off a good-sized portion of spaghetti Bolognese with a longer 30 km ride burning off three generous slices of pizza. Regular cycling is the key to reaching and maintaining good fitness and weight levels.

The following is a simple program that only requires you to ride three days a week. Just a word of caution that before starting the program if you over 35, overweight or haven't exercised regularly in a long time, you should see your doctor. This is recommended before starting any sort of new physical activity.

Regardless of your existing fitness level, if you haven't ridden a bicycle for a while, take things slowly and keep your speed at no more than about 15 kilometers an hour. Always make sure

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that you warm up with a quick series of stretching exercises before each session and don't forget to carry some water.

Suggested Program

- For your first day, start off with an easy 10-minute ride over flat terrain which should see you cover about 2.5 km.
- Repeat this again for day two and then, on day three, increase this slightly further to a 15-minute ride.
- For the second week, start off with a 15-minute ride on day one of this week, extend to a 20-minute ride on day two and then another 20-minute ride on day three.
- During the third week you can do a 20, a 25 and a 30-minute ride.
- Week four can be 35, 40 and 45-minute rides. You see that you are just gradually building your time out each day by another five minutes each time.
- From week five onwards, stay with three 45-minute rides, but introduce some small hills and try to cover more distance in the same time. By this stage you will be burning over 2000 calories or 9000 kilojoules a week.

Try to stick with it. Any habit takes about three weeks of continuous activity to form, and cycling is no different. The substantial health and fitness rewards will be worth the effort. Also, being out and about in the open air should be satisfying and you will get to see far more going on out and about around you that you would do if you were down the gym or stuck in your garage with your aerobic contraptions!

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