



Wheeling Wheelmen

11 Amazing Benefits of Biking

Queen sang about riding their bicycles, and we can't help but think that part of the reason is that there are just so many benefits of biking. Cycling is a fun form of exercise and a cost-effective way of getting from point A to B, and cycling on a daily basis can help give your physical and mental health a major boost.

Most major U.S. cities are seeing a huge boom in cycling recently. The Atlantic's Citylab reports that the share of commuters who cycle to work tripled in New York, Chicago, Washington, San Francisco, Portland, Denver and Minneapolis over the past two decades, so you'll be in good company when you head out for a ride.

And compared to the 50 minutes a day the average American spends in their cars, a bike ride offers a much bigger return on investment for your health, bank account and the environment, not to mention your productivity level and state of mind.

1. Improves Your Heart Health

Riding a bike gives you the same cardiovascular benefits as any other aerobic exercise - with the added perk of being able to do it while enjoying the great outdoors. A 2018 review in the British Journal of Sports Medicine, found cycling was associated with a lower risk for cardiovascular disease, regardless of the intensity of the rides.

2. Increases Muscular Strength and Endurance You might think of bicycling as a strictly lower-body exercise, proper cycling form activates most of your body's muscles. As you pedal, you use your hamstrings, glutes, and quadriceps, shin and calf muscles.

Your abdomen and back muscles stabilize your body, and your shoulder and arm muscles support your body at the handlebars. The harder you pedal and the more hills you climb, the more you'll strengthen your muscular system and build endurance, according to the American Heart Association.

3. Easy on Your Joints

If you want to avoid injury and keep stress off your joints, get on a bike. Cycling is a low-impact form of exercise, which is great for anyone recovering from injury or dealing with age-related stiffness, according to Harvard Health Publishing.

Cycling gives your body a workout without adding the pain of repeated jarring. This makes cycling an excellent alternative to other high-impact exercises like running, and a great way to develop greater range of motion in stiff joints.

4. Lengthens Your Life Expectancy

It gets better: Biking isn't just less risky, it can help prolong your life. A 2018 study published in the American Journal of Preventative Medicine found that cycling is positively associated with a lower risk of all-cause mortality for older individuals.

The study specifically looked at individuals between the ages of 50 and 65, and found that less than 60 minutes of cycling per week provided a significant benefit. The study also found a benefit for new cyclists and continuing cyclists alike, meaning it's never too late to get started.

5. Can Burn More Calories Than Walking

If your goal is to up your caloric burn and lose weight, a bike ride might be a better use of your time than a brisk walk. Calculations from Harvard Medical School state that while cycling for 60 minutes at 16 to 19 miles per hour burns almost 900 calories, walking at a pace of four miles an hour for the same amount of time burns only 350 calories (based on a 155-pound individual). Burn even more calories on your bike by adding speed intervals or biking uphill.

Those estimates will vary depending on your weight, fitness level, intensity and duration, of course, so if you want a more accurate, personalized estimate of how many calories you burn while biking, download an app like MyPlate.

6. Improves Your Productivity

Biking to work makes good business sense. A 2015 study conducted by the University of Cambridge, VitalityHealth and RAND Europe found that employees who cycle have lower rates of depression and obesity, higher life satisfaction scores and take significantly fewer sick days than their non-cycling coworkers. The report ultimately concluded that cycle-to-work programs have the potential to significantly impact the productivity of a business's workforce.

7. Boosts Your Mood

Ever notice a cyclist whizzing past you with a big smile on their face? As it turns out, cycling is one of the best forms of exercise for your mental health. A 2018 study published in the Lancet Journal of Psychiatry found that all forms of exercise were associated with a lower mental health burden, but cycling was among the top activities for boosting your mood.

8. Helps Fulfill Your Weekly Exercise Requirement

Cycling is an effective way of getting the suggested amount of moderate or intense aerobic exercise each week for optimal health. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, adults should do at least 150 to 300 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise a week, or 75 to 150 minutes of vigorous-intensity exercise a week.

How can you easily tell the difference? During a moderate aerobic workout, your breathing quickens but not so much that you can't carry on a conversation. During an intense aerobic workout, you'll be breathing heavily enough that it becomes tough to talk.

9. Takes You Places Driving Can't

A bike can take you places you'd never go in your car. Mountain bikers routinely see sites the rest of us stuck driving miss. And "bikepackers," or mountain bikers that carry camping gear for long-distance trips, are a whole new segment of off-road cyclist.

"While touring tends to rely on paved routes and byways, bikepacking is based on the exploration of off-pavement and backcountry trails and tracks," says Logan Watts, founder of Bikepacking.com.

Recently, there's been an explosion in bikepacking's popularity, mostly thanks to social media. So if you're keen for adventure, bikepacking could be your new favorite form of recreation.

10. Tests Your Limits

Engage your competitive side with bicycle racing. It's a fun but challenging way for active individuals to test their physical and mental limits. There are several levels of competition for riders of different abilities, from local charity rides to the top levels of competition like the Tour de France.

If you're looking for a less competitive race to participate in, charity rides can be a great opportunity. These rides are less competitive, giving every participant the ability to ride at their own pace. The community around you will help motivate you to ride at your best, and you can feel good about supporting a great cause, too.

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