

# The Wellness News

Issue 31, May 2010



## Biking for Fitness

With spring officially here, it is a great time to start incorporating outdoor cardiovascular activities into your daily routine. Take advantage of the good weather and pull your bike out of the garage! Bicycling is a fantastic form of exercise, allowing you to enjoy the outdoors while staying fit. Here are some reasons to bike and tips for getting started.

### Reasons to ride

**Fitness:** Whether your health goals are tied to weight management or simply keeping your heart healthy, biking is a great way to fit in regular cardiovascular activity. Biking also improves balance, coordination, leg strength, stamina, and endurance.

**Rehabilitation:** Cycling is a great cardiovascular option for many people with joint problems. Because biking is a non-weight bearing activity, it takes some of the stress off of joints that can be experienced in other cardio activities, like running or walking. If you are recovering from an injury, check with your doctor to see if cycling is an option for you.

**Mental Health:** Regular physical activity is associated with lower levels of stress, improved overall mood, better quality of sleep, and higher energy levels. Getting outside, as biking requires, is also associated with lowered blood pressure.

**Environment:** Using a bike instead of a car to get to work or run errands cuts down on gas emissions and lessens your personal carbon footprint.

**Finances:** Biking instead of driving also allows you to cut down on money spent at the pump as well as save wear and tear on your car.

### Getting Started

**Assess your fitness level:** If you already exercise regularly, biking is a great way to switch up your routine and offer a new challenge for your whole body. If you do not exercise regularly, check with a doctor to make sure you are physically ready to start a biking program.

### Select your bike:

**Fit-** It is important to make sure your bike is the right fit. Many bike shops will take measurements for you when you go to purchase a bike. In general, make sure that while standing over the bike, you can straddle the bike frame comfortably with both feet flat on the ground. Once seated on the bike you should be able to almost completely extend your leg when the pedal is in the bottom position. Handlebars and seat positioning vary with different types of bikes and personal preference.

**For general cardiovascular fitness, fit in at least 2 hours and 30 minutes of moderate intensity exercise each week. That is equivalent to around 30 minutes of exercise, 5 days each week.**

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## Bike Safety

**Bike Maintenance:** Every time you are about to go for a ride, perform a quick bike safety check. Check tire inflation, wheel attachment, brake levers and brake pads, handlebar security, and the bike chain.

**Helmet:** No matter if you are riding for two hours or ten minutes, it is worth strapping on a secure helmet. Helmet use reduces the chance of a serious brain injury in a bike accident by 88%. Make sure your helmet is certified by Snell, ANSI, or ASTM. The helmet should rest low on your forehead, about a finger width or so above the eyebrows, with the strap secured snugly under your chin.

**Riding with cars:** It is important to obey the laws of the road as if you were driving a car. Always ride on the right side of the road with the traffic. Be cautious at intersections and aware of the cars around you. Give pedestrians the right of way.

**Staying visible:** Wear bright clothing so people are able to see you. Attach reflectors to your bike, especially for riding at night or in weather with low visibility.

### Types of Bikes

There are four main bike styles to choose from:

**1) Road Bike:** thin and light frame, good for speed and riding long distances on paved streets

**2) Mountain Bike:** durable frame and tires, more upright body positioning, great for riding off road and on rough terrain

**3) Hybrid Bike:** combines speed of a road bike with upright positioning of the mountain bike, good for most city riding

**4) Cruiser:** single gear, focus on comfort rather than performance, good for flat terrain and casual speeds

The one you select will have a lot to do with your location and your biking goals.

**Pick your route and routine:** When starting out, keep rides around 30 minutes or so. As your endurance improves, continue to increase your time, distance covered, or intensity during your ride. The internet offers all sorts of websites that give you access to maps of your neighborhood. Map out a few possible routes to start with, or just grab your bike and go! Try [www.mapmyride.com](http://www.mapmyride.com) for routes other riders in your area recommend, or to create your own route.

## Start Biking

- Commute to work on your bike
- Replace car errands with biking errands
- Find cycling groups in your city
- Explore your neighborhood on your bike
- Have fun!



Sources: <http://bicycling.about.com/>;  
[http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/1631745/10\\_reasons\\_to\\_bike\\_to\\_work\\_pg2.html?cat=5](http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/1631745/10_reasons_to_bike_to_work_pg2.html?cat=5;);  
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