

Cycling - health benefits

Cycling can be done for transport, recreation and sport. Riding a bike is enjoyed by people of all ages. Cycling is a great way to 'escape' from worries and stress. You can cycle at anytime, anywhere, on your own or with family and friends. All it takes is a roadworthy bike, a helmet, shoes, comfortable clothes and some pedal power.

The simplicity, cost-effectiveness and ease of use of the bicycle have contributed to its worldwide use and popularity.

Cycling for fun, fitness and competition

Cycling is a great way to exercise while also enjoying the environment around you. There are 1,300 kilometers of bike tracks in Melbourne, which makes for a cyclist's paradise.

Cycling can also be a competitive sport. There are lots of clubs in Victoria and across Australia that provide the opportunity to compete at club, local, state and national levels. Cycle racing in Victoria is held all year round with a winter and a summer season. You can choose from a range of disciplines such as track and road, through to BMX and mountain bikes.

You can also take a bike holiday, such as those organised by Bicycle Victoria. These are fun events where you cycle at your leisure along scenic routes. Often fully catered, with support staff and mechanical and medical back-up, these holidays are suitable for anyone with a moderate degree of fitness.

Health benefits

Cycling is mainly an aerobic activity, which means that your heart, blood vessels and lungs all get a workout. You will breathe deeper, perspire and experience increased body temperature, thereby improving your overall fitness level. Cycling will also:

- Develop your fitness without joint stress
- Increase aerobic fitness
- Improve muscle tone and strength
- Help prevent disease (heart disease, diabetes)
- Manage weight
- Heighten energy levels
- Manage pain
- Assist in reducing stress, anxiety and depression, partly through the physical activity itself, but also due to the pleasure and satisfaction of riding a bike.

Other benefits

Cycling is also:

- A great way to stay fit and spend time with friends
- An opportunity to meet new people and discover new places
- An easy way to get around your local area
- An environmentally friendly form of transport.

Getting started

The beauty of cycling is its flexibility. You can enjoy cycling virtually anytime – by yourself, with friends, for leisure, in competition or as a mode of transport.

If you are new to cycling or not a confident bicycle rider, it can be a good idea to start cycling on bike paths. These are usually traffic-free and offer a scenic route. Cycling around your local roads can also be a good idea, as they usually have less traffic, slower motor vehicle speeds, and the roads are familiar.

Riding on local roads can be a great way to familiarise yourself with riding on the road and gaining confidence in cycling. Once you are more confident, you may want to use bicycle lanes on main roads. Whilst main roads are usually the most direct way to get to destinations, they usually carry more traffic.

Remember to maintain your safety and the safety of others at all times.

Getting started – equipment

Before you start cycling you'll need to make sure you have the right equipment. You don't need the full stretchy gear but you do need the following:

- **Bicycle** – having a bicycle that is the right size for you is important. A bicycle that is too big or too small can be dangerous and hard to control.
- **Bicycle helmet** – this should be a helmet that meets Australian Standards (AS 2063).
- **Bicycle lights** – this is important if you ride at night.
- **Bright or reflective clothing or vests** – (particularly if you ride early in the morning or at night).
- **Comfortable clothing** – make sure it's not too loose around the legs to avoid it getting caught in your bicycle chain or wheels.
- **Covered shoes** – wear shoes that are enclosed and appropriate for riding. Sandals and thongs are not appropriate.

You also need to keep up the maintenance of your bike and check the tyres, wheels, chain, brakes and light regularly. This is important to make your bicycle safe and easy to ride.

Some general tips

Before you get started:

- Buy a bike properly fitted for your size and requirements. A good bike retailer will be able to advise you on an appropriate bike.
- Have your bike serviced once a year to maintain its efficiency and safety.
- Spend some time preparing your bike by pumping up the tyres and oiling the chain if you haven't ridden for a while.
- Lock your bike and store it in an accessible place.
- Check with a doctor before taking up challenging or competitive cycling.
- Warm up and stretch your muscles and joints before embarking on a hard ride, or at least take it easy in the initial stages.
- Have plenty of fluids on hand and drink regularly.
- Consider appropriate clothes for riding. Avoid loose-fitting garments that may get caught in the mechanisms.
- Plan a route to take when you go for a ride and let others know where you're going.

Where to get help

- Your local council
- Local cycling club
- Bicycle Victoria Tel. (03) 8638 888
- Smartplay Tel. (03) 9674 8777
- 'Go for your life' Infoline Tel. 1300 739 899

Things to remember

- Cycling is a great activity to give your heart, blood vessels and lungs a workout.
- Choose a bike that is properly fitted for your size and requirements.
- Cycling is a great way to meet new people and discover new places.

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

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