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# 15 Benefits of cycling: why cycle for exercise?

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Thinking about joining the cycling family? Here are 15 reasons you should get on your bike this summer



The benefits of cycling are almost as endless as the country lanes you could soon be exploring. If you're considering taking up cycling, and weighing it up against other potential activities, then we're here to tell you that cycling is hands down the best option.

>>> Best cheap road bikes under £1000 (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/latest-news/the-best-cheap-road-bikes-143004>)



Admittedly, we're biased – but there are an awful lot of good reasons to choose bike riding as your newest pass time. Here are just a few...

## 1. Cycling improves mental well-being



Cycling makes you happy: fact. (Chris Catchpole)

A study by the YMCA (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/latest-news/its-official-cycling-makes-you-happier-305862>) showed that people who had a physically active lifestyle had a wellbeing score 32 per cent higher than inactive individuals.

There are so many ways that exercise can boost your mood: there's the basic release of adrenalin and endorphins, and the improved confidence that comes from achieving new things (such as completing a sportive or getting closer to that goal).

Cycling combines physical exercise with being outdoors and exploring new views. You can ride solo – giving you time to process worries or concerns, or you can ride with a group which broadens your social circle.



(<http://www.cyclingweekly.com>)

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Former Hour Record holder Graeme Obree has suffered from depression (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/fitness/depression-in-sport-45337>) through much of his life, and told us: “Getting out and riding will help [people suffering with depression]... Without cycling, I don’t know where I would be.”

## 2.Cycling promotes weight loss



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Weight loss is one benefit of cycling

The simple equation, when it comes to weight loss

(<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/fitness/training/how-to-lose-weight-cycling-266755>), is 'calories out must exceed calories in'. So you need to burn more calories than you consume to lose weight.



Cycling burns calories (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/fitness/nutrition/calories-burned-cycling-everything-you-need-to-know-326362>): between 400 and 1000 an hour, depending on intensity and rider weight.

Of course, there are other factors: the make-up of the calories you consume affects the frequency of your refuelling, as does the quality of your sleep (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/videos/fitness/sleep-well-ride-well>) and of course the amount of time you spend burning calories will be influenced by how much you enjoy your chosen activity.

Assuming you enjoy cycling, you'll be burning calories. And if you eat well, you should lose weight.

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### 3. Cycling builds muscle



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Build muscle on the bike (Photo: Watson)

The resistance element of cycling means that it doesn't just burn fat: it also builds muscle – particularly around the glutes, hamstrings, quads, and calves. Muscle is leaner than fat, and people with a higher percentage of muscle burn more calories even when sedentary.



To be clear – you won't end up with quads like a track sprinter unless you invest a serious amount of time at the squat rack. But you will develop a nice toned derriere.

#### 4. Enjoy second breakfasts

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WEEKLY

## **Cycling** (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com>)



If you decide to cycle to work (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/latest-news/cycle-to-work-scheme-10-things-to-know-5055>), you've got a great excuse to add a couple of guilt free snacks to your day.

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Since a half hour ride to work should be burning between 200 and 500 calories, you've got a license to enjoy a smug second breakfast at your desk.

If you're serious about burning fat (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/fitness/how-to-burn-fat-cycling-163887>), you could do your morning ride fasted (sans breakfast) – but that's mainly a habit reserved for the most dedicated of nutters.

### **5. Better lung health**





# Cycling WEEKLY

You won't be alone if this point seems contradictory to common sense. But a recent study suggests that people who ride a bike are actually exposed to fewer dangerous fumes than those who travel by car.



A study by the Healthy Air Campaign, (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/latest-news/cyclists-exposed-five-times-less-air-pollution-cars-experiment-suggests-133129#PATVMX2oPRYlzwH.99>)Kings College London, and Camden Council, (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/latest-news/cyclists-exposed-five-times-less-air-pollution-cars-experiment-suggests-133129#PATVMX2oPRYlzwH.99>) saw air pollution detectors fitted to a driver, a bus user, a pedestrian and a cyclist using a busy route through central London.

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The results showed that the driver experienced five times higher pollution levels than the cyclist, as well as three and a half more than the walker and two and a half times more than the bus user. Long story short: the cyclist won.

## 6. Cuts heart disease and cancer risk



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Up your heart health and life expectancy by bike

Cycling raises your heart rate and gets the blood pumping round your body, and it burns calories, limiting the chance of your being overweight. As a result, it's among a selection of forms of exercise recommended by the NHS as being healthy ways to cut your risk of developing major illnesses such

Cycling (http://www.cyclingweekly.com)



New evidence was presented in the form of a study conducted by the University of Glasgow (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/latest-news/new-study-says-cycling-30-miles-per-week-cuts-heart-disease-cancer-risk-half-326369>), earlier this year. Researchers studied over 260,000 individuals over the course of five years – and found that cycling to work can cut a riders risk of developing heart disease or cancer in half. The full study can be read here. (<http://www.bmj.com/content/357/bmj.j1456>)

Dr. Jason Gill of the Institute of Cardiovascular and Medical Sciences commented: “Cycling all or part of the way to work was associated with substantially lower risk of adverse health outcomes.”

## 7. Cycling is low impact



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Cycling is a low impact form of exercise

Many of the upshots we discuss when we talk about the benefits of cycling are exercise related.  
Reckon it might be easier to just go for a run?

## Cycling (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com>)



Running is weight bearing – and therefore injury rates are higher. Cycling, by contrast to running (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/fitness/which-is-best-cycling-or-running-23455#wzkXz2gVLh0HPtLO.99>), is not weight bearing.

When scientists compared groups of exercisers – long distance runners and cyclists, they found the runners suffered 133-144 per cent more muscle damage, 256 per cent more, inflammation and DOMS 87 per cent higher.

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**Coming Up:** Which groupset do you prefer?



**Poll:** Which groupset do...

Whilst cycling is less likely to result in an overuse injury, they can still crop up. A professional bike fit (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/fitness/bike-fit>) is a good idea – skimping here is a false economy if you end up spending more cash on physio.

The lack of weight bearing also means that cycling does not do as much to increase bone density as other sports – so it's a good idea to add a little strength training (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/fitness/strength-training-for-cyclists-is-it-worth-it-125222>) in to your programme

your programme.

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## 8. Cycling saves time

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Cycle to save time (and money)

Compare these three experiences:



1. Get in the car, sit in traffic, queue to get into the car park, pay to park, arrive



2. Walk to bus stop, wait for bus, complain about bus being late, get on bus (pay), watch as it takes you round-the-houses, arrive, about half a mile from your destination
3. Get on the bike, filter past traffic, lock (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/product-news/7-of-the-best-bike-locks-5221>) the bike, arrive

Short journeys contribute massively to global pollution levels, and often involve a fair amount of stationary staring at the bumper in front. Get on the bike, and you'll save on petrol or cash on public transport, as well as time.

## 9. Cycling improves navigational skills





# Cycling WEEKLY

Get lost in the lanes, and let your sense of direction get you home. (Andy Jones)

In the world of car sat navs and Google maps, sometimes there's just not that much incentive to sharpen your natural sense of direction (however superior or otherwise it may be).



Unless you've invested in a GPS cycling computer (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/group-tests/cycling-gps-units-buyers-guide-181254>) with mapping capabilities such as a Garmin 1000 (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/reviews/computers-gps-watches/garmin-edge-1000>), then getting out and exploring the lanes can provide essential exercise for your internal mapping capabilities, giving you (with practice) a better idea of which way is West.

## 10. Improve your sex life



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## Cycling could improve your sex life

Most of us know that sex is a good thing, but not everyone knows that it's actually good for your overall health. In fact, regular sex could indeed prolong your life.



Dr Michael Roizen, who chairs the Wellness Institute at the Cleveland Clinic, says: “The typical man who has 350 orgasms a year, versus the national average of around a quarter of that, lives about four years longer.” Similar findings were revealed for women.

So can cycling improve your sex life (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/videos/fitness/can-cycling-help-sex-life>)? Well – it builds some rather essential muscle groups. Dr Matthew Forsyth, urologist and keen cyclist from Portland, Oregon, commented: “All these muscles [worked on the bike] are used during intercourse. The better developed these muscles, the longer and more athletic intercourse will be.”

Add in that – thanks to spending plenty of time showing off all the lumps and bumps in skintight lycra (and occasionally double-oh-AND-seven) – cyclists tend to be fairly comfortable in their own skin, and you’ve got a recipe for success.

## 11. Sleep better



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Ride a bike for a good night's sleep

It probably isn't rocket science that tiring yourself out on the bike will improve your sleep (http://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/latest-news/physical-performance-affected-by-lack-of-sleep-27300)– but now it's been proven. Researchers at the University of Georgia



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studied men and women aged 20 to 85 over a period of 35 years, and found that a drop in fitness of 2 per cent for men and 4 per cent for women resulted in sleep problems.

Dr Rodney Dishman was one of the lead authors, and commented: “The steepest decline in cardiorespiratory fitness happens between ages 40 and 60. This is also when problems of sleep duration and quality are elevated.”

Looking for causes behind the link the scientists suggested it could be a reduction in anxiety, brought about by exercise, that elevates the ability to sleep. Exercise also protects against weight gain with age, which is another cause of sleep dysfunction.

## 12. Boost your brain power



Up the power of your noggin

Exercise has been repeatedly linked to brain health

(<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/fitness/cycling-brain-health-115401#RqbvuDeO0xRQ0mAH.99>) – and the reduction of cognitive changes that can leave us vulnerable to dementia later in life.

A 2013 study (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/fitness/cycling-brain-health-115401#RqbvuDeO0xRQ0mAH.99>) found that during exercise, cyclists' blood flow in the brain rose by 28 per cent, and up to 70 per cent in specific areas. Not only that, but after exercise, in some areas blood flow remained up by 40 per cent even after exercise.



Improved blood flow is good because the red stuff delivers all sorts of goodies that keep us healthy – and the study concluded that we should cycle for 45–60 minutes, at 75–85 per cent of max ‘hear rate reserve’ (max heart rate minus resting heart rate) four times a week. Nothing stopping you riding more, of course.

### 13. Improve handling and spacial awareness





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Improve your handling skills – on and off the bike!

Cycling isn't just about raising your heart rate and getting you breathless – unless you're doing it on Zwift. (http://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/product-news/zwift-turbo-trainer-game-171798) There are technical elements – climbing

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(<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/videos/fitness/faster-climbing-saddle>), descending (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/latest-news/five-best-cycling-descent-videos-142719>) and cornering (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/fitness/training/bike-handling-techniques-improve-cornering-148960>) all teach you to use your body weight to get the bike to go where you want it to.

Gaining the skills to manage these technical elements can provide a massive confidence boost – especially when you start to see improvement. Plus, you might just find your abilities to manage that dodgy shopping trolley with the wonky wheels greatly improves.

## 14. Strengthen your immune system

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Sleep well, eat well and your immune system should be improved



Dr. David Nieman and his colleagues at Appalachian State University studied 1000 adults up to the age of 85. They found that exercise had huge benefits on the health of the upper respiratory system – thus reducing instances of the common cold.

Nieman said: “People can knock down sick days by about 40 percent by exercising aerobically on most days of the week while at the same time receiving many other exercise-related health benefits.”

Professor Tim Noakes, of exercise and sports science at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, also tells us that mild exercise (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/latest-news/cycling-and-the-immune-system-178179#cY2s7bYB0tIXMtAy.99>) can improve our immune system (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/latest-news/cycling-and-the-immune-system-178179>) by increasing production of essential proteins and waking up lazy white blood cells.

Why choose the bike? Cycling to work (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/latest-news/cycle-to-work-scheme-10-things-to-know-5055>) can reduce the time of your commute, and free you from the confines of germ infused buses and trains.

There is a but. Evidence suggests that immediately after intense exercise, such as an interval training session (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/fitness/interval-training-%E2%80%A8the-long-short-121219>), your immune system is lowered – but adequate recovery such as eating and sleeping well can help to reverse this. (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/latest-news/cycling-and-the-immune-system-178179>)

## 15. Grow your social circle



# Cycling WEEKLY

Cyclists from VC Colets

Cycling is an incredibly sociable sport. Grassroots cycling revolves around cycling club culture – which in turn revolves around the Saturday or Sunday club run: several hours of riding at an intensity that enables easy chat, interrupted only by a cafe stop (or the occasional puncture).



Joining a cycling club or group is an excellent way to grow your social circle, and if you're new to riding – you'll probably find all the maintenance and training advice you may have been looking for there, too.

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## Most read this week

1. Michael Goolaerts dies after suffering cardiac arrest during Paris-Roubaix  
(http://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/racing/verandas-willems-rider-michael-goolaerts-suffers-cardiac-arrest-paris-roubaix-375834)
2. 'You're doing a disservice to cycling': Strava thread gets completely out of hand after rider takes Zwift KOM  
(http://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/latest-news/youre-disservice-cycling-strava-thread-gets-completely-hand-ride-takes-zwift-kom-375231)
3. FDJ riders round on Tony Martin to accuse him of causing massive Tour of Flanders crash (video)  
(http://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/racing/fdj-riders-round-on-tony-martin-to-accuse-him-of-causing-massive-tour-of-flanders-crash-video-375154)
4. Peter Sagan takes spectacular Paris-Roubaix victory after huge 54km attack

<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/racing/peter-sagan-takes-spectacular-paris-roubaix-victory-after-attacking-with-55km-to-go-375809>

5. Watch: Ian Stannard and Arnaud Démare among riders disqualified for riding under closing level crossing in Scheldeprijs (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/racing/stannard-demare-among-riders-disqualified-for-riding-under-closing-level-crossing-gate-375373>)
6. Illegal bike setup sees New Zealand disqualified from Commonwealth Games team pursuit (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/racing/new-zealand-disqualified-commonwealth-games-team-pursuit-375501>)
7. Nine cyclists injured after collision with Porsche SUV in Mallorca (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/latest-news/nine-cyclists-injured-collision-suv-mallorca-375595>)
8. Niki Terpstra uploads Tour of Flanders ride to Strava, revealing the stats behind his stunning victory (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/racing/niki-terpstra-uploads-tour-of-flanders-ride-to-strava-revealing-the-stats-behind-a-stunning-victory-375170>)
9. Cleaning truck deployed on Paris-Roubaix route to remove mud from cobbles (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/racing/truck-brought-in-to-clean-mud-off-paris-roubaix-cobbles-ahead-of-sunday-375700>)
10. This is the state of some of the Paris-Roubaix cobbles just three days ahead of the race (<http://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/racing/state-paris-roubaix-cobbles-just-three-days-ahead-race-375562>)

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