

# 7 ways CYCLING BOOSTS YOUR WELLBEING

It's official: cycling is the UK's most popular lockdown sport\*. Here's why getting on the saddle should be your new activity for the summer

**S**ure, workouts that take place within the four walls of a gym have their place, but there's nothing like free-wheeling with the wind in your hair and embracing nature in its true form on a bike. And, while the latest indoor cycling technology might make the sport more accessible, you could be missing out on the vital health benefits that you would normally experience when out on the open road, such as reduced stress and decreased risk of depression, according to the experts. But don't just take our word for it. Celebrities like Khloe Kardashian, Sarah Jessica Parker and Selena Gomez have all been known to feel the power of the pedal too. Ready to join the velo-ution? Let's ride.

1

## IT DECREASES YOUR VISCERAL FAT

Visceral fat is found on your internal organs, such as your liver, stomach and intestines, so in other words, it's the kind that you carry around your midriff. Cycling helps to burn this, especially when done at the correct duration and frequency, says Jamie Lloyd, performance coach ([jamielloyd.co.uk](http://jamielloyd.co.uk)). "Aim to cycle for two minutes when the road is flat at an RPE [rate of perceived exertion] level of five [when you're riding consciously quicker, but are still able to talk] and then crank it up to a level seven. Doing 10 of those for half an hour will be a great fat-burning workout."

2

## IT BOOSTS YOUR MOOD

If you're keen on pounding the pavements, you'll probably be familiar with the runners' high, but is there such a thing as the cyclists' equivalent? Well yes, apparently. "Cycling supports a reduction in depressive symptoms which, in turn, helps you to feel more positive," says Professor Mathew Wilson, head of sport and exercise medicine at the Institute of Sport Exercise & Health (ISEH), in partnership with The Princess Grace Hospital (part of HCA Healthcare UK, [hcahealthcare.co.uk](http://hcahealthcare.co.uk)). "[The activity] releases serotonin – a mood neurotransmitter – which enhances self-esteem and self-confidence." It's also a great way to reduce your stress levels, too. "Exercise in general will produce endorphins which will lower your cortisol levels and this can help the immune system, thyroid and even the reproductive system," says Luisa Valenti, co-founder of Your Body Programme ([yourbodyprogramme.com](http://yourbodyprogramme.com)).

3

## IT LOWERS YOUR RISK OF CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE

A healthy heart is something that we may take for granted, but with the British Heart Foundation suggesting that heart disease in women is twice as deadly as breast cancer, looking after our tickers is essential for protecting us against cardiovascular diseases. "Cycling strengthens your cardiovascular system, which has endless benefits to your overall health," says Luisa. "It strengthens your heart, making it more efficient at pumping blood around your body and improves your lung capacity. This decreases the risk of heart attacks, strokes and high blood pressure."



4

IT'S AN EXCELLENT MODE OF TRANSPORTATION

New research suggests that people who walk or cycle to work are at lower risk of death or serious illness compared with those who commute by car, so if you're preparing to head back to the office, try a greener option if possible. You'll also be geared up to tackle your 9am project meeting too, says professor Mathew. "There are two main benefits of cycling as a mode of transportation: firstly, research has suggested that we're more productive at work if we've completed physical activity prior. Secondly, cycling saves time, money, and has an incredibly positive impact on minimising global pollution levels." Win-win!

5

IT HELPS YOU TO SLEEP BETTER

Have you ever been so exhausted from a workout that it's made you want to crawl back into bed? Us too, and for good reason. "Cycling encourages the release of the human growth hormone (HGH) into your bloodstream during sleep," explains Jamie. "This helps your body to fall into a 'proper sleep' and a boost from cycling can help those who find it difficult to nod off." We should mention that any high-intensity exercise will cause short-term spikes of HGH levels, but with your body's exertion efforts after a cycling workout, you'll be in the land of nod in no time.

6

IT BUILDS MORE MUSCLE

Fat-burning? Tick. Sleep-inducing? Tick. But what about the impact cycling has on our muscles? "The resistance element of cycling strengthens the quads, glutes, hamstrings and calves in particular and, by building strength in these muscles, your bone density will improve and you'll reduce your risk of osteoporosis," states Luisa. Exercising outside will also help with extra prevention against weakened bones: "Cycling gets you into the sunshine and that sunlight provides vitamin D, helping to keep our bones strong and boost our immune systems."

7

EASY ON THE JOINTS

High impact activities, such as HIIT or running, can be off-putting for those who suffer with knee or hip problems, which can be consequently painful and less enjoyable, says Professor Mathew. "Through cycling, you can get many of the same health and fitness benefits, without having to put too much stress on your body. This is an especially useful benefit of cycling for those who are older or injury-prone and want to avoid putting too much strain on their joints."



CYCLING SAVIOURS

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