

The Review

On your bike!

No time for the recommended 30 minutes of exercise a day? But have you got time for illness? Physical inactivity is a major risk factor for cancer and a bigger risk factor for coronary heart disease than smoking, hypertension, or obesity.¹

It can be difficult to muster enthusiasm for exercise after a busy day at the surgery. Cycling to work and home visits as a GP are often possible and with a little effort and organisation can easily incorporate regular exercise into your daily routine. The health benefits you will enjoy, coupled with the time and money savings, the environmental benefits, and positive patient message are not to be missed.

This summer we have been inspired by British professional cyclists — Bradley Wiggins winning the Tour de France and Gold in the Olympic time trial and Lizzie Armitstead claiming Silver at the Olympics, and not forgetting the success on the track. With ever-increasing fuel costs, now is the time for the British nation to shift away from the motor car and rely on pedal power as a means of getting around. Such physical activity embedded into the lives of ordinary people would serve as the most effective way of improving public health. GPs need to be leading by example by cycling to work and home visits.

Cycling on our roads is safer than you may think. The benefits massively outweigh the risks: life years gained outweigh those lost from accidents by 20 to 1.¹

Cycling to work results in a 39% reduction in all cause mortality (in addition to the benefits from any exercise you may do already)² and results in the cyclist enjoying the fitness of a person 10 years younger.³ Reduced cardiovascular risk, reduced risk of breast and colon cancer, and control

of body weight are all proven perks of commuter cycling.¹

Our RCGP Chair, Professor Clare Gerada, is an avid cyclist, back on her bike despite two significant accidents. *'I once had my bike stolen by my patient Charlie. I went and got it back!'* I interviewed her in her cycling attire, fresh from cycling across London. Towards the end of our interview she excused herself returning in a silk dress and heels ready to deliver a presentation to 400 people. An inspiration. She looked invigorated, professional, energised, and healthy.

Clare said *'I think when I'm on my bike. My best ideas come when I'm on my bike'*, while Heather her press officer reports, *'cycling between meetings helps Clare maintain her focus and keeps her stress levels down'*. With the challenges of modern general practice I propose that commuter cycling may be the ideal tool to prevent burnout and cynicism. Cycling to work increases productivity, boosts self-esteem, reduces the risk of mental illness, and aids sleep.⁴

Dr Hugh Dawson is a cycling GP in Cambridge; *'cycling keeps me happy ... I will always find a pretty route to go, will stop in the market and buy an apple, try and run an errand, that I could not do in the car because of parking'*.

Cycling to work helps combat climate change. With sustainability increasingly on the NHS agenda and stringent targets to reduce NHS carbon emissions by 80% by 2050 we all need to play our part.

You may be afraid of getting wet or having helmet hair. Home visits, long distances and lack of time in the middle of the day are obvious barriers to cycling to work as a GP. However, for many of you, cycling will be more possible than you may think.

Home visits are often within 1 or 2 miles of the surgery. Cycling is often quicker than driving: twice as fast in London at rush hour.⁵ On a bike, traffic and parking issues are eliminated (although Professor Gerada complains that the House of Lords does not have anywhere to chain bikes and she has to watch where she chains it to prevent the police from removing it). Bristol-based cycling GP Dr Knut Schroeder comments, *'On a bike journey times are predictable'*.

The equipment required for home visits nowadays easily fits into a pannier or

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rucksack and can be tweaked according to the telephone triage. Smart phones reduce the need for heavy books. Good waterproofs and under dressing to prevent excessive sweating are essential in the middle of the day cycle trip but you soon get into the swing of this.

Other options to consider are an electric bike or purchasing a pooled practice car to use for home visits, thereby allowing staff to walk or cycle to work. Electric bikes are useful where commutes are long and essentially make hills flat. They enable you to zoom past conventional cyclists at the lights and you still get a workout and therefore the positive health benefits.

- Join the movement.
- Become a car-less crusader.
- Cycling will get you invigorated, healthy, looking and feeling fab.

And remember — there is a 97% chance of not getting rained on.⁵

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