

GET OUT AND BIKE: AN EXERCISE WITH BENEFITS YOU'LL LOVE

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TIME TO MOVE IT!

Besides being fun and a great way to socialize, here are five top benefits you get from biking:

Stronger muscles. When you push forward with one foot, you're working the muscles in your buttocks, thighs, and calves. The other foot is working the hamstrings in the back of the thighs and the flexor muscles in front. If your route includes climbing hills, your arms and upper body will also get a workout as you stand to pedal.

Better balance. In order to balance upright while biking, you have to engage your abdominal muscles; to hold the handlebars and steer, you have to work your arm and shoulder muscles. Between those two functions, your brain and body learn to regulate a tricky balance that becomes second-nature once you've mastered it.

More active circulation. A few rounds around the block is a great aerobics workout. "Aerobic" means your heart, brain, and blood vessels also get a workout. According to Lisa Callahan, MD, medical director of the Women's Sports Medical Center at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York City, you get the same cardiovascular benefits from cycling that you get from any other form of aerobic exercise -walking, jogging, or dancing.

Better bones. The resistance that it takes to pedal pulls on the muscles, and then the muscles pull on the bone. This process increases bone density. That's why biking is a great way to prevent osteoporosis, or the thinning of bones that increases your risk of fractures.

Better moods. As aerobic exercise, biking also triggers the release of endorphins, the body's feel-good chemicals that help to ease depression and give you a brighter outlook on life.

TIPS FOR BEGINNERS

"Fit"- first and foremost. Whether you're biking indoors or outdoors, good bike fit is essential. If you're just starting to bike, you may want to choose a beach cruiser or comfort bike.

Indoor biking. Many gyms offer cycling classes; they usually also have

recumbent bikes so you can stretch your legs out in front of you (easier for beginners).

Outdoor biking. Before your head outdoors, make sure your bike is in good working order and that you ride with tools to fix a flat or, the very least, a cell phone. A helmet* is essential as is reflective clothing if you're riding at dusk or night. If you're just starting out, try 10-30 minutes on flat terrain to avoid extreme soreness. Source: <http://www.moveitmonday.org>



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