

**Sneak in Some Extra Exercise
and Save the Planet By**

Biking to Work

By Alexis Andrianopoulos

*If you could reduce fat and stress, save money,
strengthen your heart, lower air and noise pollution,
and decrease traffic congestion, would you do it?
Participate in Bike To Work Week 2007 - May 14-18 -
and you'll be doing all of that, and more.*



The physiological benefits of cycling are many. The cardiovascular exercise provided by bicycling can increase your metabolism, burn calories, strengthen your heart, reduce fat, lower your health care costs, improve your quality of life, and decrease your level of stress. (Plus, who doesn't want those sculpted leg muscles that professional cyclists have?)

"Fitness is a great reason to ride, and commuting to work is a great way to start," says Elizabeth Preston of the League of American Bicyclists. "After all, you have to get to work and get home!"

Commuting by bicycle can also save you money. According to AAA, the nation's largest organization for motorists, when driving 15,000 miles a year, the cost of owning and operating a new vehicle in 2007 is 52.2 cents per mile - or \$7,823 per year. On the other hand, the cost of operating a bicycle for one year is only \$120, according to the League of American Bicyclists.

The benefits to the environment are significant as well. According to the Nationwide Personal Transportation Survey, 25% of all trips are made within a mile of the home, 40% of all trips are within two miles of the home, and 50% of the working population commutes five miles or less to work. Yet more than 82% of trips five miles or less are made by personal motor vehicle.

Furthermore, 60% of the pollution created by automobile emissions happens in the first few minutes of operation, before pollution control devices can work effectively. Since automobile cold starts create high levels of emissions, shorter car trips are more polluting on a per-mile basis than longer trips. Research conducted by the WorldWatch Institute indicates that a short four-mile round trip by bicycle keeps about 15 pounds of pollutants out of the air we breathe.

Now that you're convinced and ready to take action, where do you start? In the five-county area, a great resource is the

Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia. In addition to offering safety tips, advocacy opportunities, and blogs, the Coalition's website includes recommended bike routes to and from various points in the five-county region and maps that delineate bike paths and roads with designated bike lanes.

Want a more personal connection? Go to your local bike shop, where you'll find not only equipment and clothing, but also information about organized rides, commuting tips, and bike clubs in and around Philadelphia such as the Bicycle Club of Philadelphia, Suburban Cyclists Unlimited, Central Bucks Bicycle Club, and Brandywine Bicycle Club. The bike shops and clubs all have organized group rides and routes mapped out for the solo rider.

Chances are you already have a bike in your basement, garage, shed, or other storage facility. Get it out, dust it off, and get ready to ride. "All you need, the bare-bones minimum, is a bike and a helmet," says Scott Robinson, a manager with High



Road Cycles of Wayne and Doylestown. Elizabeth Preston of the League of American Bicyclists agrees, "Get your bike in working order: pump the tires, lube the chain, and check the brakes."

If your commute is five miles or less, simply wear your work clothes while you bike to work, explains the Bike League's Elizabeth Preston. "If you are

riding more than five miles, though, pack your clothes and change at work." Deborah Seitz, who regularly commutes by bike from Roxborough to her office in Center City, leaves shoes and some basic clothing items in her office but carries other essentials in special bags on her bike.

"We recommend that people not ride on highways or main roads," urges Elizabeth Preston. "Instead, look at a map for smaller roads that have bike lanes," such as the ones provided by the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia. "Better yet, ride with someone," advises Elizabeth Preston.

"Once you are on the road, behave like a vehicle," says Elizabeth Preston. Follow the rules of the road, obey all signs and traffic signals, ride in the direction of traffic, and maintain a nice straight line. "Behave in a predictable manner so drivers know what you are doing," Preston urges. "Make eye contact with drivers so that you are sure they have seen you." Mike McGettigan, owner of Trophy Bikes in West Philadelphia, suggests wearing light colored clothing and reflective materials, and fitting your bike with lights if there is any chance you'll be riding at dusk or at night.

Once you arrive safely at work, make sure you have a lock and a safe place to lock your bike for the day - until you need it to ride back home. You might want to check with your boss about storing your bike inside. Some businesses will make accommodations for employees who bike to work.

Finally, have fun! Like any form of exercise, if cycling to work is not fun, you are not going to stick with it in the long run.

For more information, contact www.bikeleague.org, www.bicyclecoalition.org, www.trophybikes.com, or www.highroadcycles.com.



Alexis Andrianopoulos is a beginner cyclist and duathlete and an aspiring triathlete. She regularly teaches several fitness classes - including, of course, Spinning -- in the western suburbs and Delaware. Contact alexis@phillymagazine.com