

Getting Started

A Guide to Commuting by Bike



www.cyclingscotland.org

This handout is written for you if you live too far from work to walk regularly, but close enough that you could cycle. It does not suggest that everyone should travel by bike, or that you should to do it every day, but aims to help you to enjoy the benefits when you want to.

There are many reasons not to get to work under your own power. You may find, though, that with a little help or encouragement you could take advantage of the benefits of using some of your journeys to make your life better.

You may feel you want to lose weight or feel healthier so that you can get more enjoyment from your free time.

Perhaps you find yourself stuck in heavy traffic most days when a bike will get you where you need to go quickly and efficiently.

Maybe you just want to start your day with an enjoyable activity that is popular with people of all ages and abilities.

Both the Scottish Executive and the NHS encourage cycle usage as part of healthy living. It can be a gentle, low impact activity prescribed by doctors for people recovering from illness or not used to being active. It is also a very efficient way to get from A to B. A bicycle actually improves the efficiency of your body. Even a moderately fit person could get on a bike and cover a mile faster than an Olympic runner, and with much less effort. Being able to use a bicycle for your

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journey to work allows you to add some activity to your day without having to find extra time to do it.

People who have a moderately active lifestyle are able to burn off some of life's little treats without having to make extra effort to do so. While an excess of unhealthy foods or alcohol is never a good thing, most of us enjoy one or both at least now and again.

Every time you make the decision to cycle to work, you will be using your journey time to gently get rid of unwanted calories, and helping yourself to live a longer, more enjoyable life. Instead of tiring you out, moderate exercise will stimulate your brain, making you feel more alert, will reduce levels of stress, and even help boost a positive frame of mind.



Here's what you stand to gain:

Live Longer – 1 in 4 Scots will die prematurely as a result of inactivity. Cancer, coronary heart disease, obesity, respiratory disease and diabetes are all more likely in people who do not find a way to incorporate moderate activity into their lives. Cycling to work is recommended by the NHS as part of active living.

Look Better – Gentle cycling uses fat for fuel. Your journey to work will help you to lose weight and shape your body. Because it is easy to control how hard you are working, cycling is even recommended as suitable exercise for cardiac rehabilitation or while recovering from injury, so it is an



ideal activity of you have not been taking regular exercise.

Feel Better – People commuting in vehicles breathe in 25% more pollution

Your journey to work will help you to lose weight and shape your body.

that those walking or cycling. This can cause headaches, eye pain, asthma and respiratory complaints. Cycling to work a few days per week will mean that you're in better shape to enjoy your leisure time. Every time you exercise, especially outdoors, you boost your immune system, helping you to fight off illness.

Save Money – Apart from walking, cycling is the cheapest way to travel (see graph on page 5). If you commute by public transport you can work out how much money you will save every month by cycling to work. In addition to parking charges, driving short distances in heavy traffic uses much more fuel than driving on open roads. It also causes much more wear and tear to your engine. If you are thinking about getting yourself in shape, you can avoid paying for classes, gym memberships or specialist sport equipment through travelling to work by bike.

Give Your Brain A Boost – Regular physical activity helps more than just your body. People starting their day with a ride to work become more alert, confident and able to deal with tasks. You will also deal better with stress or anxiety and boost your self confidence.

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Want to give it a go?

Here's what to consider –

1. Before you get going...

Many people are put off cycling because a badly adjusted or ill fitting bike will be difficult and uncomfortable to ride. Ensure that the tyres are at the recommended pressure (printed on their sides), that the brakes and gears work, and that you know how to use them. You may want your local bike shop to do this for you. They can also help you to make sure that your saddle and handlebars are set correctly for comfort and efficiency.

2. Get used to your bike...

Bicycles are designed to let you cover distances in a comfortable, efficient manner. Before starting to commute, it is a good idea to spend some time away from traffic making sure that you feel confident using your bike. If you need advice about cycling skills, your route to work or riding in traffic, contact the Cycling Scotland (details on back cover). Even experienced cyclists often need a few trips to get comfortable after a break from riding, so you should expect to do the same.



3. Check out your route...

Use a weekend or evening to practice your journey. There may be bike routes, bus/bike lanes or quieter roads for you to use. You will need somewhere to lock your bike at or near work. When your route is familiar, it is easier to ride with confidence. If your employer needs advice on providing facilities, you can contact the Cycling Scotland for information about the Cycle Friendly Employer Scheme.

4. Be prepared...

Most people who ride to work do so in their regular work clothes. You may, however, want to leave some items at work to allow you to wear a sweater, sports shoes and a jacket for your journey. It is worth considering a set of waterproofs and mudguards to keep your clothes dry on rainy days. Cycle clothing is now available in casual, rather than sporty styles. Although designed to look like regular clothes it can make a huge difference to your comfort. This is especially true of padded shorts which are available in 'cargo' style or as liners to wear under regular clothes. You may want to carry some simple tools, a pump and spare tube, although properly inflated tyres rarely puncture unless badly worn.



5. Make it easy on yourself...

Once you are in the habit, you may not think twice about riding year round, and in most weather, but to start with it is worth choosing a week with a good weather forecast. Your first 3 or 4 trips may be a new experience for your body, but you will adapt quickly if you persevere. The biggest mistake you can make is to give up straight away because you think exercise will always feel uncomfortable. It won't and you'll lose the benefit of the good work you have already done.

6. Pace yourself...

In the same way as there's a big difference between a gentle stroll and an energetic jog, it is up to you how much effort you put into your cycle. While some people choose to cycle fast to increase their fitness or cut down travel time, it is perfectly possible to use the easier gears on your bike to ride along with very little effort. By doing this you can arrive at work without worrying about being out of breath or sweaty.

7. Tell your friends...

The best advertisement for increasing cycle usage is the people who do it. Regular commuters know the difference that riding to work makes to life. By increasing the number of journeys made by bike, we help not only ourselves but everyone around us. The benefits in terms of air and noise pollution, reduced ozone depletion and the economic benefits to Scotland will affect everyone.

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The Cost of Travel

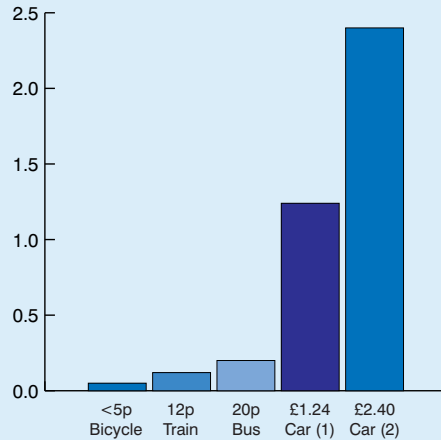
How much do you spend on getting to work?

If you use public transport you can work out how much money you could save every month.

Weekly fuel and maintenance costs for people commuting short distances by car (under 5 miles) average between £25 and £30*. In addition, faster depreciation in the value of your vehicle caused by using it for short journeys makes driving the most expensive option for most people.

In comparison, the average cost of running and maintaining a bicycle is under £1 per week, and involves negligible depreciation and no parking costs.

Average cost of travel per mile



Car (1) fuel + maintenance

Car (2) fuel + maintenance + depreciation

Note: car costs do not include parking charges

*figures taken from AA on average of 1000 miles per year



We hope that this booklet will encourage you to give cycling a try. Your local authority will be able to provide information on suitable bike routes for leisure or commuting as well as the location of cycle parking facilities. If your employer could support cycling to work, we can provide information on the Cycle Friendly Employer award scheme. For information on this or other aspects of cycling, please use the contact details on the back cover.

“ I thought that cycling would tire me out, but after trying it I found I had more energy, even at the end of a long day.”

Julianne McGinley Marketing Assistant



“As a father of two children, commuting to work by bicycle gives me the opportunity to balance a busy family life with my personal health needs.”

David Carroll Team Leader



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If you have any questions regarding cycling in Scotland, contact us at:

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