



Cycling and loving it!

Encouraging women to cycle

What are the benefits of cycling for women?

- Cycling is a form of physical activity that is easy to do.
- Cycling can be done across the lifespan, from 4 years to 104 years.
- The health benefits of cycling include increased life expectancy; reduced risk of heart disease, cancer, type 2 diabetes and depression; increased well-being; and improved cognitive functioning.

- Cycling is a time efficient way of building physical activity into your daily life.
- It's a very social form of exercise and can be done with friends, partners or family.
- When cycling replaces car use as a form of transport, everyone benefits from cleaner air, less traffic congestion, lower noise levels, and more socially connected and liveable communities.

- Cycling for transport is a cheap and convenient form of transport, especially for women who don't have access to a car.

"I like the way it keeps me fit and I don't have to think about it!"

What motivates women to cycle?

Women cycle to improve their health and wellbeing, and also for social, environmental and personal reasons.

"The hardest thing to overcome was my own inertia – but once my friends got me out there I was hooked!"

The most important health and wellbeing factors are:

- health and fitness,
 - building physical activity into their busy lives,
 - fun and enjoyment,
 - getting outside in the fresh air, and
 - relaxation/stress reduction.
- The most important social and environmental reasons are:
- the convenience and low cost of cycling for transport,
 - cycling with a group, club or friend,
 - encouragement from family and friends,
 - being active with their family/partner, and
 - concerns for the environment.

The most important personal factors are:

- time out for your self
- trying something new or learning new skills
- undertaking a new challenge or achieving a goal and
- being a good role model for family, friends and workmates

"By riding to work two days a week I save \$6.10 on trains each day. In a year I recouped the cost of buying my bike."

Cycling combines the health benefits of physical activity with a range of environmental, transport and community benefits.

Want to know more?

The following websites include information on cycling, places to ride, tips, bike shops, and clubs/Bicycle User Groups:

www.womenscycling.com.au

www.rideabike.com.au

www.bv.com.au



or, for more information, contact the Cycling Promotion Fund on 9818 5400, or Bicycle Victoria on 8636 8888

These guidelines are based on findings from the 'Revolutions for Women' research project, the general cycling research literature, and the experiences of a range of women and men involved in promoting cycling for women.

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If you would like more information about the 'Revolutions for Women' research report, please contact:

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"I never thought I could ride to work let alone finish the Great Victorian Bike Ride – now I'm doing both."

What keeps women cycling?

- The cycling experience needs to be fun
- Women enjoy acquiring and practicing new skills (eg cycling in traffic, riding in a group) in a safe and supportive environment
- Staying together on a group ride (not getting dropped or left behind)
- Having goals to work towards and achieve (often a cycling event such as the Great Victorian Bike Ride, Around the Bay in a Day, or a triathlon)
- Having realistic role models (women 'like them' rather than elite cyclists)
- Hearing other women's cycling stories (particularly stories about overcoming their fears and difficulties)
- Social connectedness – seeing their friends
- Women friendly bike shops who make you feel welcome and give you good advice

"The 'door-to-doorness' of cycling is great. It delivers you right at the door a lot faster than public transport or in a car."

What women want to achieve varies depending on their interests, skills and ability

- Learning to use your gears
- Changing a tyre for the first time
- Completing your first 100km ride

What does 'safe' mean to women?

- For some 'safe' means cycling on bike paths and trails free from traffic.
- For others, 'safe' means cycling on the road with a group that has good cycling skills, looks after the group members and obeys the road rules.

What cycling programs appeal to women?

- Cycling programs for beginners:
 - provide basic theory and information using presentations, group discussion and printed materials
 - encourage learning through demonstration from an experienced, trusted facilitator
 - encourage learning by doing - with an experienced role model
- hands-on practice is crucial (eg use of gears, changing a tyre, cycling in traffic)
- learning the formal road rules that apply to cyclists
- learning the 'unwritten' rules of cycling in traffic and with other cyclists

- programs held at a time (eg Saturday morning), place (community centre or bike shop) and cost that suits women's needs

- learning new skills (eg cycling in traffic) at their own pace
- links to local community resources (cycling groups and clubs, female-friendly bike shops)

"If I wasn't riding my bike in I'd be on a crowded train, everybody coughing and spluttering, whereas when I'm on the bike I'm breathing in that air near the river and I can hear the birds."

- More experienced cyclists are looking for:
 - advice on new bicycle technology and equipment
 - improving their skills in group riding, bicycle maintenance, and training for more challenging rides
 - access to good quality, affordable coaching for improved performance
 - access to a cycling group at the right fitness/ability level

Women enjoy the non-competitive nature of cycling for recreation and transport

- When looking for a cycling club or group, women prefer one that provides:
 - group rides, participation in cycling events, and social activities

- support for all riders regardless of ability – 'ride leaders' to look after newcomers/slower riders

- support through the early stages of gaining the skills, fitness, strength and speed to cycle with more experienced cyclists
- events that emphasise participation rather than competition
- a critical mass – knowing that someone will always turn up for a ride

- good communication about events and activities through the internet, email, mail and newsletters

What makes cycling events appealing to women?

- Well organised (transport to and from the ride, appropriate food, accommodation and facilities)
- Good back-up support both on and off the road.

Encouraging women to cycle is one thing - creating the conditions that keep them cycling is vital

- Conducted in a safe, scenic and pleasant environment
- Achievable distances and terrain (not too many steep hills)
- Encouragement and support to 'go at their own pace'

- Opportunities for social interaction

"The idea of riding on the road scared me, but once I tried it I found it wasn't that bad and now, like when you get the run of green lights down Collins Street – it's great!"

Addressing specific needs

- Women who cycle to work appreciate:
 - starting off with a cycling 'buddy' to help with route choice and road model safe cycling in traffic
 - showers
 - clean changing areas, preferably with power points for hairdryers
 - lockers
 - access to safe bike parking
- Older women often prefer:
 - leisurely recreational rides on bicycle paths and trails with good surfaces
 - riding with someone who can fix punctures/mechanical faults
 - shorter distances (10-20km) and relatively flat terrain



- Women with children need to:
 - know about the range of products designed specifically for young families
 - check out the equipment that suits the age of the child
 - learn how to load kids onto bike seats and trailers

- make sure that their children's bikes and equipment meet safety standards

"I love getting out with the kids – after working all week and the kids in child-care, the last thing I want to do is get them minded while I go to the gym!"

What do women value in a bike shop?

- Attention to details in repairs
- Good product range for women, eg bikes in a range of sizes and good selection of cycling clothing in a range of sizes
- Honesty and trustworthiness
- Good guarantee and back up service
- Staff who don't talk down to them
- Staff who don't make assumptions about their interest, level of knowledge and budget and have the ability listen
- Additional service such as bike maintenance courses and tips on places to ride and people to ride with