

Get Fit Fast On A Bike



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BY BARBI WALKER

If your goals this year include getting fit or losing weight, biking is an ideal choice that's not just for athletes anymore. Biking is a great way to lose weight, improve cardiovascular health, and gain muscle strength and endurance all in one sport. Bicycling burns a lot of calories. Riding at a moderate speed, around 13-15 mph, you can burn upwards of 500 calories per hour—done daily that equals 3,500 calories, which is enough to lose one pound in a week! Bicycling is a high-reward workout.

Fully geared and single-geared bicycles (also called fixies), mountain bikes, road bikes, and cruisers—anyone from out-of-shape beginners to fitness fanatics can find a bike to suit his or her needs. Even the heaviest of riders can reap quick health benefits from riding, and without risk of joint injury. Cycling is a non-impact exercise so your joints won't take a beating from repetitive jarring or pounding. Getting started is as simple as getting on the bike and making a commitment to ride every day—just ask Jason Robert of Tempe.

Robert's story

In the summer of 2009, Robert was watching the Tour de France while vacationing at his in-laws' house in Nova Scotia when he had his epiphany. "I couldn't believe the fitness levels these guys had, some of them older than me," he says. Robert was 36 years old and weighed 285 pounds the day of that race, and it was then that he decided he wanted to change.

"I decided by the time I turned 40 I wanted to be in shape and fit," says Robert, and it all started the minute he

arrived home. Robert says he was so serious that he went straight from Sky Harbor International Airport, luggage and all, to REI to buy a bike.

Making the commitment to get up every morning at 4:30 to ride through the quiet Arizona State University Research Park before it was busy with morning traffic was challenging, he says, but worth it. The time and location gave him a safe place to ride while increasing his confidence and fitness level. Working out and fitness were new to him, says the much slimmed-down cyclist, who completed his first half-ironman last December. To date, he has completed the Tour de Scottsdale, Tour de Tucson, and many triathlons.

Establishing a routine

Establishing a regular riding routine (or any fitness routine) is the first and most important step in slimming down and getting fitter. Commit to riding at least an hour a day, and at least four days a week, to speed up your fitness level and weight loss, but aim for seven days a week to get the greatest caloric deficit. Cycling builds lean muscle tissue, which causes your body to burn calories at a higher rate, upping your basal metabolic rate (BMR), and allowing you to continue burning calories long after you've peeled off your jersey. Once you've established your regular cycling routine, up the ante on your caloric burn with interval training.

Interval training speeds up the fat-burning process. One can accomplish this by alternating between bursts of high-intensity speed, pedaling as fast as you can for about 30 seconds, followed by returning to your regular speed. If you do this during your regular hour ride on alternate days over a two-week period, your ability to burn fat increases by 36 percent, according to research in *Journal of Applied Physiology*. In just those 30 seconds of full-throttle, all-out sprinting in your highest gear, you amp your body's furnace. A study by Laval University found that sprinters who burned only half as many calories during a regular workout still lost more weight and burned more calories than those who worked out at longer, slower speeds.

Robert agrees. "High-intensity intervals a few times a week spike your metabolism, and we all live time-compressed lives, so make the most of your one-hour ride," he says.

The important thing to remember is to ease into interval training. Build up your endurance, confidence and comfort if you are brand-new to fitness or cycling, then add in your 30-second sprints.

Proper nutrition is the last component for maximizing your fitness and weight loss. Think in terms of nutrition, not diet. Most fad diets will not provide the proper nutrition to maintain performance and sustained weight loss—any diet that isn't balanced will fall short. "There's plenty of disagreement about what to eat even among seasoned, successful athletes, coaches and sports nutritionists," notes Selene Yeager, writer for *Bicycling.com* and cycling expert. One thing they all agree on, however, is the importance of eating real food. Eat food that is unprocessed and in its natural form. Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, and lean protein, and avoid saturated fat, and you will see results quickly.

Few exercises can beat bicycling for quick and effective weight loss. With its low-impact nature and the ability for all ages to join in, bicycling is a sport to consider.

Barbi Walker is a freelance writer and an award-winning journalist. Barbi lives in Phoenix with her husband and young son.

SOURCES

bicycling.com

"Ride Your Way Lean: The Ultimate Plan for Burning Fat and Getting Fit on a Bike" and "Every Woman's Guide to Cycling: Everything You Need to Know, From Buying Your First Bike to Winning Your First Race" Selene

Yeager, Bicycling.

