



Fitness editor **Martha Lourey-Bird** explains how pedal power can help you tone up, trim down & live longer.

THE BENEFIT CYCLE

YOUR CYCLE-OFF-THE-KILOS PLAN

MONDAY: Spin class at the gym or interval training on a stationary bike for 45 mins (15 mins warm up/cool down + 30 mins interval riding for 2 mins easily then 1 min hard).

TUESDAY: Pilates for posture, flexibility & core strength. You can also do it at home with a DVD if classes aren't your thing.

WEDNESDAY: Stationary bike ride at home or the gym for 45 mins at moderate intensity level (still able to talk). Listen to music, watch TV or chat to a friend to help pass the time.

THURSDAY: Focus on upper body strength training. Do up to

3 sets of 8–12 reps to work the muscles you're not using when you ride. Try doing bicep curls, tricep dips or some push ups.

FRIDAY: Yoga, just like pilates, is fantastic for your posture & flexibility. Try a class or DVD.

SATURDAY: A long road ride for 1 hr. If you don't have an outdoor bike or aren't confident enough to hit the streets, start indoors on a stationary bike at home or the gym. Stick to a steady, yet challenging, pace you can maintain the whole ride.

SUNDAY: Your choice. Pick any of the activities from the other weekdays & try doing it again.

WHEEL OF FORTUNE

Cycle for three hours every week and you could decrease your mortality risk by 40%, reduce cholesterol levels, risk of heart attack and stroke, increase your work capacity and fitness.

Cycling is great cardio exercise that's not just for the super fit. There are so many cycling options around – from indoor spin classes to outdoor group cycling – that there's sure to be something to suit everyone.

Why it's so effective

Cycling is extremely beneficial if you're trying to lose weight for two main reasons. First, it's low impact and so safer on joints than walking. Secondly, it tones your calf muscles, thighs and buttocks at the same time as supporting your back and entire body weight.

How to get started

There's lots of fancy equipment around but if you're just starting out, stick to the basics – a water bottle and some comfortable tights will do the trick. Once you're hooked, you can get carried away with all sorts of fancy cycling accessories. Also, ensure the correct seat height by standing next to the bike first to check the seat is level with your hips, so that when you pedal you can fully extend your knee but not have to lock it.

STATIONARY BIKES

Stationary bikes are a great way to get 'saddle fit' or used to sitting on a bike seat. They're also one of the most convenient ways to cycle as you can do it at the gym or in the comfort of your own living room. You don't have to worry about traffic and – even better – you can watch your favourite TV program, listen to music and stay entertained as you pedal.

There are two different types of indoor stationary bikes: the most common upright variety and the recumbent option, which is lower to the ground so that you sit back into it to support your spine. Unless otherwise instructed, the typical upright option is all you need and they take up less space.

SPIN CLASSES

These are motivating indoor group exercise classes where everyone pedals on a stationary bike lead by an instructor who's cycling as well. You're taken through a cycling program of

FAST FACTS

Cycling is the 4th most popular physical activity across Australia.

Bike sales in Australia have outnumbered new car sales for 8 years running.

varying intensities, speeds and terrains while listening to upbeat music. Spin classes will get you sweating and boost your heart rate, meaning they're brilliant for increasing fitness and, as a result, weight loss. Make sure you let the instructor know you're new to cycling so you can be shown how to adjust the bike and remember to try and take it easy for the first few sessions.

ROAD RIDING

Before hitting the busy roads, seek out bike tracks, quiet streets and weekend rides to build up your road riding confidence. Also, ensure you wear bright, reflective clothing for maximum visibility and safety. Joining a road riding club is a fantastic way to build up your cycling confidence, get fit, lose weight, improve your health and socialise while you exercise. Road riding can be good for increasing stamina and endurance as club members often ride long distances together.

MOUNTAIN BIKING

Not for the faint-hearted, mountain biking is done off road, often on fire trails or in the bush. It's bumpy and rugged, but lots of fun. There's a variety of tracks around to suit all abilities. It's great for your agility and strength, as well as for improving cardio fitness. However, you will need a slightly meatier bike, so take this into consideration when buying or upgrading. www