
Cycle like the Scandinavians for a healthier society

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Cycling to and from work can reduce the risk factors associated with heart disease. So do it like Denmark and get on your bike, say scientists.

Stop taking the bus, car, or train to work and take up cycling to reap the health benefits, say the scientists behind two new studies.

[Research in Sweden](#) [7] has shown that cycling at least one kilometre to and from work can reduce the risk of obesity, high blood pressure, cholesterol, and diabetes. All four are risk factors for heart disease--one of the most common causes of death around the world.

While [in Denmark](#) [8], cycling for as little as one hour a week was found to reduce the risk of developing heart disease.

“Cycling promotes good health, regardless of whether you do it for exercise or just for transport. This is important information, because we know that many people struggle to find time to exercise, and after all, it’s easier to take your bike to work than find a gym,” says Anders Grøntved, an associate professor from the Department of Sports Science and Clinical Biomechanics at the University of Southern Denmark.

Grøntved is the lead-author on the Swedish study and a senior author on the Danish research.

Read More: [Making cycling safer for cyclists and drivers](#)[9]

Society benefits from dropping passive transportation

Public health authorities should place a much larger emphasis on the health benefits of cycling, says Grøntved.

“We’re generally doing well with this in Denmark and Scandinavia, but there’s room for improvement outside the big cities,” says Grøntved.

Associate Professor Kristian Overgaard from the Department of Public Health at Aarhus University, Denmark, agrees. He was not involved in either of the new studies.

“It’s important for public health authorities to urge people to use more active forms of transportation, but we also need to improve infrastructure in order to make it happen,” says Overgaard.

Denmark already has good cycling infrastructure, but there is still room for improvement, he says.

Read More: [More cycling with e-bikes](#)[10]

The rest of the world can learn from Scandinavia

Choosing the bike over the car or other forms of public transport has plenty of other beneficial effects, says Grøntved.

“Cycling eases traffic and reduces vehicle pollution, which is a big problem in all large cities around the world,” he says.

The new results should be especially helpful outside of Scandinavia, where there is a “gigantic potential” to develop cycling, says Grøntved.

“There are many places, for example in Asia, where they used to have a cycling culture. But it’s been pushed aside in favour of scooters and cars. These results can be used to put cycling back on the agenda,” he says.

Read More: [Fast cyclists live longer](#)[11]

Data from thousands of Scandinavians

Both studies are based on multiple years of data collected across Denmark and Sweden.

One study was based on the cycling habits of 53,723 Danes at the start and the end of a five year period. Participants were aged between 50 and 65 years. Their health data was collected 15 years after the end of the five year study.

Participants who cycled at least one hour a day from the start of the five year period, were between 11 and 18 per cent less likely to develop heart disease 15 years later, compared to those who did not cycle.

Those who began their cycling regime sometime within the five years, and cycled for 1.5 hours a week on average, were 26 per cent less likely to develop heart disease.

In Sweden, 23,732 people with an average age of 43.5 years took part in a ten year long study.

By the end of the ten years, the scientists discovered that cyclists were 39 per cent less likely to be overweight than those who used more passive forms of transport to commute to and from work.

They were also 11 per cent less likely to develop high blood pressure, 20 per cent less likely to suffer high cholesterol, and 18 per cent less likely to show signs of diabetes.

Both studies accounted for other factors that could have influenced the results, including education level, smoking, alcohol and diet.

Read More: [How Hitler decided to launch the largest bike theft in Denmark’s history](#)[12]

The more you cycle the better the effects

So how far do you have to cycle before seeing these positive effects?

The further the better, according to Grøntved.

“Everything indicates that cycling more than one kilometre to work has a positive effect on blood pressure, fat content in the blood, and the risk of developing pre diabetes,” he says.

Though cycling less than one kilometre to and from work will probably not have any significant impact, he says.

"There was no significant difference between non-cyclists and cyclists who cycled less than one kilometre to work," says Grøntved.

[Read the Danish version of this article on Videnskab.dk](#) [13]

 [Cycling at least one kilometre to and from work can reduce your risk of developing high blood pressure, cholesterol, and diabetes, shows two new studies in Denmark and Sweden. \(Photo: Shutterstock\)](#) [14]

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[Bicycling to Work and Primordial Prevention of Cardiovascular Risk: A Cohort Study Among Swedish Men and Women, Journal of the American Heart Association \(2016\).](#)

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December 16, 2016 - 06:25

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