

SOME COMMON MYTHS

"But it's too dangerous!"

The actual risk of cycling is tiny: there is one cyclist death per 33 million kilometres of cycling⁷.

Being sedentary presents a greater risk: over 50,000 people die in the UK each year due to coronary heart disease related to insufficient physical activity⁸, compared to around 100 cyclists killed on the road⁹.

"We can't promote cycling until there is a safe cycle infrastructure"

Cycling is safe, and research supports the concept of 'safety in numbers': the more cyclists there are, the safer the streets become¹⁰. Improving both real and perceived road safety is nevertheless important, and brings with it greater benefits in terms of reduced injuries, especially in disadvantaged groups.

"Cycling isn't a public health priority"

Adult and childhood obesity are at epidemic levels in the UK. Cycling is an important way to incorporate regular physical activity into daily lives. It also addresses other key public health agendas including reducing carbon emissions and improving social inclusion.

"We don't know what works"

Recent evidence-based guidance from the National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence supports the creation and maintenance of infrastructure to support cycling¹¹.

"No-one round here cycles anymore"

Cycle use on the National Cycle Network has increased every year since it was launched. London has seen bike use increase by over 80%, following a package of measures including congestion charging and investment in infrastructure. While numbers of people cycling are up, levels of those being killed or seriously injured on bikes are down.



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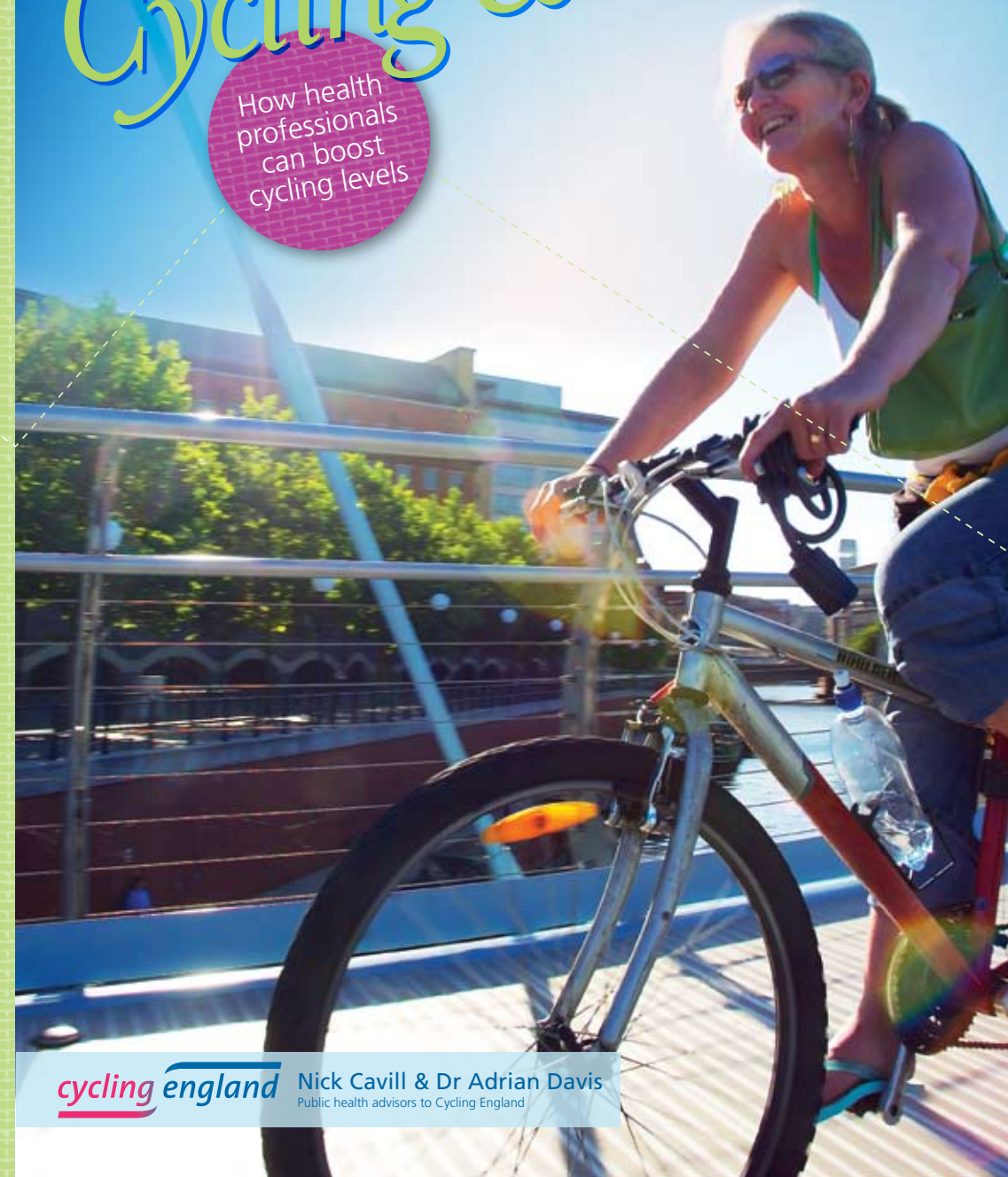
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Cycling & Health

How health professionals can boost cycling levels



cycling england

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This leaflet is a brief summary of the report 'Cycling and Health: what is the evidence?' The report reviews all the available evidence on the health benefits of cycling and pulls it together in one place for the first time. It aims to be an essential reference guide for health practitioners. The full report is available from www.cyclingengland.co.uk

Cycling: evidence for the health benefits

Cycling is an easy and low-impact activity which can significantly improve individual fitness and which has the potential to have a major impact on public health.

It can help to reduce the risk of a range of health problems, notably heart disease and cancer, the leading preventable causes of premature death.

In a country like the UK, where obesity is at epidemic levels among adults and young people, one of the main benefits of cycling is that people can do it as part of their normal daily activity – by cycling to work, to see friends or to the shops – rather than having to find additional time for exercise.

One study found that people who cycle to work experienced a 39% lower rate of all-cause mortality compared to those who did not – even after adjustment for other risk factors, including leisure time physical activity¹.

Getting on your bike can yield much the same health benefits as doing a specific training programme. Cycling for an additional 30 minutes on most days of the week, combined with reducing calorie intake, can achieve weight loss comparable to that achieved by doing three aerobic classes a week².

As well as improving physical health, cycling has a positive effect on emotional health – improving levels of well-being, self-confidence and tolerance to stress while reducing tiredness, difficulties with sleep and a range of medical symptoms³.

Safety

One of the barriers to taking up cycling is a perception of the physical danger posed by motor traffic. However, the real risks are minimal and, the research suggests, are outweighed by the health benefits by a factor of around twenty to one⁴. It may be more risky to your health to be sedentary.

Conclusion

It's vital for the health of the nation – and the health of the planet – that health and transport professionals focus on positive actions to encourage cycling, especially where a cycle journey will replace a car journey.

Local transport and health authorities need to recognise the potential of cycling to improve many aspects of public health, and place it at the heart of a healthy transport strategy, devising safe cycling policies and promoting the use of cycling – by children and adults alike – on a daily basis.

What can Primary Care Trusts do?

Lead by example

- Make sure the PCT has a travel plan for its staff. Ensure that it has good provision for cycling, and is followed, monitored, evaluated, and revised if necessary
- Audit the provision of cycle parking for staff, and other facilities such as showers
- Pay a meaningful cycle mileage allowance, at the same level as the car mileage allowance if possible
- Make sure the PCT is signed up to the Bike to Work programme⁵ (which enables staff to purchase bikes at significantly reduced cost through a salary sacrifice scheme)
- Audit the provision of cycle parking for patients and visitors at hospitals and GP surgeries – this encourages more cycling and makes a visible commitment to cycling
- Launch a Bike User Group to bring together PCT staff who cycle
- Establish a level playing field for staff travel by charging an appropriate amount for staff car parking to cover the true cost of that parking provision

Influence policy

- Work with the local authority to influence the content and delivery of the local transport plan. Don't just focus on direct measures for cycling – include measures aimed at reducing traffic speeds and volumes, improving road safety more generally, and tackling planning that encourages car dependency such as out of town shopping centres. As well as promoting cycling for health this will help to tackle inequalities

- Link with the local authority road safety team to influence school travel plans in your patch – emphasising the health benefits of active school travel
- Develop a PCT cycling policy – ideally within a wider physical activity strategy
- Ensure cycling is integrated into key aspects of local public health policy, especially local area agreements
- Convene an area-wide cycling and health policy group to bring together representatives from different disciplines

Actively promote cycling

- Fund a programme of Bikeability training – for key workers in contact with the public and/or for priority population groups
- Consider a Health on Wheels-style project, offering led rides for priority population groups⁶
- Make connections with walking projects such as *Walking the Way to Health* and offer cycling as an additional option
- Link to local cycling clubs, who may be able to offer training, rides and promotional events
- Encourage health trainers, school nurses and health visitors to reinforce the message about cycling (and walking) being important for the health of children
- Promote the health benefits of cycling in public literature and at public events such as Bike Week. Stress that the benefits are considerably greater than the risks

It's vital for the health of the nation

CASE STUDIES

Primary Care Trusts promoting cycling

Liverpool PCT is one of the few to employ a full-time cycling officer to promote cycling and coordinate a programme of led rides for priority target groups. The PCT and local authority work closely on strategic issues influencing provision for cycling through a transport, health and environment forum.

In Nottingham, the PCT is developing an innovative approach to promoting cycling through working with NHS Health Trainers, who will be encouraged to offer cycling as a core part of their public health work alongside issues such as smoking prevention and promotion of healthy eating. Health Trainers will be trained in how to introduce a cycling intervention, targeting the most deprived areas in the city.

In Bolton, the PCT is working closely with cycling and mental health charities to offer ten week led ride programmes to mental health service users. The programme offers the opportunity for participants to rediscover the

joy of cycling and the benefits to their mental wellbeing in a safe and supportive environment. National standard instructors lead rides through some of Bolton's beautiful town parks, with an emphasis on helping participants continue cycling when the scheme finishes by linking them into other cycling groups.

In Northamptonshire, cycling is being included in the award-winning work of the Healthy Communities Collaborative, which recruits local people as volunteers to take part in health promotion programmes. The "Easy Rider" programme will offer guided leisure cycling rides, access to cycles at low or no cost, and transport for cycles to safe places to ride.

In Exeter – a Cycling Demonstration Town – people are being encouraged to 'cycle to their heart's content' through a targeted rides programme, evaluated by the PCT in conjunction with the local authority.

