

Get a bicycle and ride; you will not regret it

By: Jean Munoz, Your Health
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The beauty and art of cycling is celebrated for three weeks each July as the world watches the legendary Tour de France - the world's biggest annual sporting event.

Since 1903 this romantic sporting event has awed spectators with its great victories, unexpected disasters, the glory and the agony of competition and daily testaments of human potential pushed to the limit by overcoming obstacles in the face of adversity.

These highly trained athletes, fashioned in tightly fitted lycra and shaved legs, cover more than 2000 miles in 21 days on a compilation of carbon and other lightweight materials framed into a bicycle worth more than my car.

You don't have to race the Tour, or even watch it, to enjoy and appreciate the joys of cycling. All you need to do is get out and ride.

Cycling is a window to the world outside, and also to the world inside. It serves as a refuge from the dramas of every day life. It is an amazing opportunity expand your limits physically, mentally and spiritually as you go further, faster and to places you've not been before. It is a time to clear your head, connecting mind to body, building strength both physically and emotionally.

Overcoming obstacles on the bike cultivates confidence and a desire and skill for overcoming obstacles in your daily life. And, it's fun!

Cycling builds strength and endurance, and is an excellent weight management tool. Carrie Pollo has been riding recreationally and competitively for 11 years. She initially discovered cycling as a way to stay fit and to lose some weight.

"I think my first bike ride was something like 7 miles total, and it almost killed me," she said. "When I first started riding, I lost 40 pounds in about four months. I was hooked."

The rest is history. To look at Carrie's defined, toned and strong body today, you would never guess that she ever had a weight issue. "The accomplishment and great feeling of making it to the top of a hill, and then the adrenaline rush going down the hill fast with the wind blowing in your face. It's fun!" The fresh air blowing in your face cultivates the feeling of being alive, feeling your body as you challenge yourself physically and mentally. You see the world differently when on a bike. The potholes on Barton road are a lot more noticeable when you are on two wheels with no suspension than when driving in a car.

You notice the details going at a slower speed. You appreciate the grade of a climb more when you have to climb it using your own horsepower - or, having the reward of descending it after you've worked so hard to get to the top. You notice the trees, where it is shaded and where it is not. You take paths you would not normally take.

Bruce Hendler has been riding recreationally and competitively for more than 20 years. "It's incredible to me that I can ride a bike to the places I have been," he said.

Today, Bruce owns Rocklin based AthletiCamps, a leader in cycling camps and coaching for recreational and competitive cyclists seeking to improve their performance.

Cycling is for the entire family. It's an excellent way to improve your personal health, but it is also a great activity to keep the kids off the couch. Carrie, her husband Jay (whom she met on the bike) and son Zach ride together as a family. Whether you are riding 50 miles or cruising to the park to fly a kite with your kids, you can enjoy your alone time on the bike, or bonding time with family and friends.

How to get started

The first step is to get your bike out. Make sure you put air in the tires and lube on the chain.

Don't have a bike? Get one!

The most important thing is to make sure that your bike fits you. If you want to ride distance, a road bike is likely your best bet. If you are interested in exploring trails off-road, or even just fire roads, then you may want to consider a mountain bike.

If you are going to be cruising around town with the family, consider a mountain bike, hybrid or cruiser will serve you well.

There are several great bike shops in the area, with professional staff, who can assess your needs and make

recommendations on what bike suits your riding style and budget. They can also make sure you are fitted properly, which makes all the difference in the world for a comfortable ride.

http://www.placerherald.com/articles/2007/08/22/features/your_health/01munoz.txt

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