

The business case for encouraging cycling

Encouraging staff to cycle more has benefits for both employers and employees. With the amount of time we spend at work and our increasingly sedentary lives, it is important to integrate physical activity in and around the workplace and during our commutes.

The costs of inactivity

The cost to the economy and businesses

[Low levels of physical activity are leading to poor health and wellbeing, costing UK businesses:](#)

- £8bn per year through productivity loss as a direct result of cardiovascular disease (CVD)
- £29bn per year through sickness absence
- £15.1bn per year through presenteeism

The cost to individuals

Even people who exercise frequently are still at risk of the negative impacts of sedentary behaviour on health, [especially through sitting at work](#). A [large study](#) involving over 100,000 U.S. adults found that those who sat for more than six hours a day had up to a 40 percent greater risk of death over the next 15 years than those who sat for less than three hours a day. Most importantly, this effect occurred regardless of whether the participants exercised. The study showed that prolonged sitting cancels out the effects of exercise in otherwise active people, with 2 hours of sitting cancelling out 20 minutes of exercise.

The benefits of activity

Benefits for workplaces

[The British Heart Foundation](#) stress the importance of health at work, and state that healthier staff:

- Have better morale, leading to improved staff and management relationship
- Take less time off, resulting in reduce absenteeism costs
- Are less likely to leave, contributing to a better corporate image
- Perform better, leading to improved productivity
- Are more productive, giving better job satisfaction

Benefits for the individual

[According to the NHS](#), there is strong scientific evidence that being physically active can help people lead healthier and happier lives.

[The NHS](#) states that people who exercise regularly have a lower risk of developing many long-term (chronic) conditions, such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, and some cancers. [Research shows](#) that physical activity can also boost self-esteem, mood, sleep quality and energy, as well as reducing your risk of stress, depression, dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

There is a long list of medically proven health benefits for people who do regular physical activity, including:

- up to a 35% lower risk of coronary heart disease and stroke
- up to a 50% lower risk of type 2 diabetes
- up to a 30% lower risk of depression

[A five-year study carried out by the British Medical Journal](#) compared people who had an active commute with those who travelled sitting down (e.g. in a car). The researchers found that commuting by cycling was associated with a lower risk of all-cause mortality and adverse CVD and cancer outcomes. They also found that even people who only cycle part of their journey to work received health benefits.

Other benefits for active commuters include:

- Saving time, as people can commute and exercise at the same time
- Exposure to daylight helps in setting your body clock for the day while giving yourself a dose of vitamin D
- Giving your eyes a long-distance workout (a vital antidote to desk-based work)
- Improving your mood – The ability of exercise to boost mood is undisputed. Studies have shown regular, moderate-intensity exercise to be as effective as anti-depressants in cases of mild to moderate depression

Other benefits of increasing levels of activity through cycling

Enabling and encouraging you staff to cycle to work can help increase their levels of activity.

Cycling on lunch breaks or after work provides staff with an opportunity to socialise and connect, away from the office environment. This can help improve relationships among staff and increase engagement within the workplace.

Encouraging workers to contribute to the success of workplace cycling activities by volunteering as cycle champions or be part of a bicycle user group can build leadership skills and can increase engagement with your organisation. These skills could be acknowledged in personal development reviews and training records. Increasing the number of people that cycle to work can also help reduce the number of single occupancy car trips to your site and help relief pressure on your car parking capacity.

With more people cycling in your company, and by offering support for them, you can demonstrate your business' commitment to sustainability and the health and well-being of your staff. This will strengthen your Corporate Social Responsibility status and can contribute to your ISO 14000 standards.

Please see our ['Promoting cycling' toolkit](#) for ideas on how to encourage cycling in your workplace.

Further information and support

Want to encourage smarter travel to work at your organisation? Businesses in Exeter, Barnstaple and Newton Abbot are eligible for free business support to start travel planning, including support offers for individual members of staff. Email traveldevon@devon.gov.uk to find out more.

[Active Devon](#) is a community-focused, non-profit organisation dedicated to inspiring and supporting people in Devon to be active. They can help you get your workplace more active and support you with behaviour change campaigns, workplace challenges, programme management, design, consultancy and more. Please contact Active Devon via 01392 925 150 or hello@activedevon.org.

Please note: When following our toolkits, please also refer to the [government guidance for safer travel](#).

This page was last updated November 2020.

URLs

- British Heart Foundation – Information cost of inactivity to UK economy and businesses and importance of health at work: <https://www.bhf.org.uk/informationsupport/publications/health-at-work/health-at-work—business-case-infographics>
- Study on negative impacts of sedentary behaviour on health: <https://academic.oup.com/aje/article/172/4/419/85345>
- NHS – health benefits of exercise: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/exercise-health-benefits/>
- Study on benefits of active commutes: <https://www.bmj.com/content/357/bmj.j1456>

- Active Devon website: <https://www.activedevon.org/>

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