

# OVER FORTY?

## HERE'S WHY CYCLING MAY BE PERFECT FOR YOU

Simple enough for a child to master, but challenging enough to keep Chris Froome's heart racing – cycling is a sport that can be enjoyed at almost any age. However, middle age may just be the perfect time to start – here's why, along with seven key tips for cyclists over 40!

Reaching your forties and beyond generally comes with the joys of more wisdom, life experience and financial stability. However, it can also come with lower energy levels and stubborn fat around the waist! This is because your metabolism takes a serious drop, making it easier to pick up weight if you're not mindful.

If you're looking for a physical activity option to help burn the calories and lower the risk of chronic diseases of lifestyle, cycling may be for you. The sport can effectively help maintain good cardiovascular health, as it gets your heart rate up, but is easier on your knees than running. This makes it an increasingly popular option for those hitting middle age.

Cycling can help you meet recommended exercise requirements, while also protecting your joints from overuse and injury. Whereas running generates impact on the hips, ankles and knees, cycling allows you to build both strength and stamina, without hammering your joints. This makes it ideal if you are looking to cross-train; are recovering from injury, or if you're just looking for a fun way to stay active.

While cycling can help combat the many health risks that come from inactivity, here are some factors to keep in mind when starting a new exercise regime in middle age.

### GET STARTED BY JOINING A CLUB OR SIGNING UP FOR A CYCLE CHALLENGE

Middle age may just be the perfect time to start (and most enjoy) cycling, as many older athletes have been shown to develop greater fatigue resistance with regular training. In other words, middle-aged cyclists could well have the persistence to go the distance. While you might not be beating personal bests as you might've in your twenties or thirties, with age, you can start enjoying the social aspects of sport more. Signing up for a mass participation event like the 94.7 Cycle Challenge can motivate you, and make your training sessions especially rewarding. If you're keen to give cycling a go, you can find a 30km training programme for beginner cyclists in the Physical Wellbeing library.

- Cycling allows you to build both strength and stamina, without hammering your joints.
- Weight-bearing exercise is important to combat the increasing bone and muscle mass loss that comes with aging.
- It's especially important to focus on postural exercises if you cycle a lot.
- Many cycling-specific injuries are caused by incorrect bike set-up, so make extra sure your bike is adjusted and positioned in a way that works for you.

## 7 TIPS FOR CYCLISTS IN THEIR FORTIES AND BEYOND

- #1** Your peak bone mass can start to decline drastically from your forties, commonly resulting in lower back, hip and knee problems. Because cycling is non-weight-bearing, it doesn't maintain bone mass the way running would. A prolonged lack of stress on your bones can make them more prone to fracture. Weight-bearing exercise is important to combat the increasing bone and muscle mass loss that comes with aging, so counter its effects by weight-training at least three times a week. Cross training between a non-weight-bearing exercise (such as cycling) and a weight-bearing exercise (like running or walking) provides a good balance.
- #2** A loss of muscle mass and muscle tone can also affect your posture and bone density, so add backand core-strengthening exercises to your fitness regime. It's especially important to focus on postural exercises if you cycle a lot, so work on stretching out your chest muscles and strengthening your upper and lower back muscles.
- #3** Avoid picking up an injury by allowing yourself more recovery time between training sessions.
- #4** Another tip to lower the risk of injury is to make sure you have good form (technique), even if the exercise takes you longer to complete.
- #5** In addition, many cycling-specific injuries are caused by incorrect bike set-up, so make extra sure your bike is adjusted and positioned in a way that works for you. There are many specialist bike shops that will assist you with your bike setup at minimal cost.
- #6** Reflexes slow with age, making accidents due to a deteriorating sense of balance more common. Pilates or yoga can help keep your neural system in tip-top shape. There are also many simple exercises that you can practise which will assist with improving your balance and proprioception (the ability to sense the position of our body segments in relation to the rest of our body in space). Try balancing on one leg for a minute without touching the floor with your other foot. Once you're steady doing that, up the challenge by closing your eyes and doing slow single-leg squats or bouncing a ball against a wall while balancing on one leg to help enhance your proprioception.
- #7** Keep up cardiovascular training for 20 to 60 minutes per session, three times a week. Train at a moderate to vigorous intensity (that is, where you can still answer a short question, but not chat).