

Extra support helps obese women cycle to and from work

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Increased daily exercise can prevent diabetes and cardiovascular disease in obese women, but getting started and maintaining new habits is a challenge. A new study by researchers at the Swedish medical university Karolinska Institutet shows that extra support and encouragement can help more women to exercise to and from work.

"Physically active transport is probably our best bet for helping populations at risk of [heart disease](#) and [diabetes](#) to increase physical activity levels, since we have to spend time getting to and from work anyway," says Dr Erik Hemmingsson, who led the study now published online in the *International Journal of Obesity*.

The study was carried out at the Obesity Unit at Karolinska University Hospital in Stockholm and lasted 18 months. It involved 120 obese and unfit women between the ages of 30 and 60 with a waist circumference of at least 88 centimetres (34.6 inches). The subjects were randomly assigned to two groups, a control group that focused on walking and an intervention group that focused on cycling.

The control group was given pedometers and attended two two-hour group meetings, at which they were encouraged to walk to and from work to attain a daily step count of 10,000. The cycling group received the same support plus three individual consultations with a physician, who provided each women with a Physical activity on Prescription (PaP) specifically encouraging them to cycle to and from work. They also attended two additional group meetings and were lent a new ladies'

bicycle during the 18 months.

The results show that a larger proportion of the women in the intervention group (39%) cycled two kilometres or more per day than the women in the control group (9%).

"Bearing in mind that many of the women in the cycling group hadn't been on a bike since they were children, it was gratifying to see that so many of them actually managed to cycle regularly to work," says Dr Hemmingsson.

Roughly the same proportion of [women](#) in both groups achieved the goal of 10,000 steps a day which suggests that cycling does not have to detract from daily walks.

"The support programme given to the intervention group was deliberately not particularly expensive since we wanted the programme to be a feasible option for primary care," adds Dr Hemmingsson. "A positive side-effect was that car-driving dropped by 34 per cent."

More information: "Increased physical activity in abdominally obese women through support for changed commuting habits: a randomised clinical trial", Hemmingsson E, Uddén J, Neovius M, Ekelund U, Rössner S, International Journal of Obesity, online 5 May 2009, DOI: 10.1038/ijo.2009.77.

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