

It is unclear if programs to encourage cycling are effective

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More research and evaluation are needed to determine the most effective community programmes to encourage cycling, says a study published in the British Medical Journal today.

The authors, led by Dr David Ogilvie from the Institute of Public Health in Cambridge, say that it is unclear whether community approaches to increase cycling amongst children and adults have anything more than a modest effect.

Established research shows that cycling is linked to greater cardio-respiratory fitness in adults and children. And general [physical activity](#) reduces the risk of [heart disease](#), [type 2 diabetes](#), some cancers, and premature mortality. However, most UK adults do not do enough physical activity, say the authors, so the desire to increase cycling is understandable, particularly as cycling is a form of physical activity that could be incorporated into many people's daily routines as a mode of transport, potentially resulting in both health and environmental benefits

The question remains, say the authors, are cycling initiatives effective? Ogilvie and colleagues carried out an exhaustive review of twenty-five studies from seven countries (Australia, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, the UK and the United States) that were linked to cycling promotion.

Several of the programmes specifically promoted cycling, one focused on targeted intervention in obese women and others were linked to

improving cycle route networks to work or school.

The authors argue that the evidence is unclear on how effective such programmes are, concluding that most schemes were associated with a modest benefit of the order of a 3.4% increase in household trips made by bike.

They say it essential that future research contain more robust measures to evaluate the impact of cycling schemes delivered through schools and work. "Further controlled evaluative studies incorporating more precise measures are required, particularly in areas without an established cycling culture."

In an accompanying editorial, Professor Nanette Mutrie from the University of Strathclyde and Fiona Crawford from the Glasgow Centre for Population Health, stress that even modest gains from cycling schemes would have an effect on the health of the population.

They concur with Ogilvie and colleagues that more robust evaluation is needed about cycling promotion initiatives. They say: "better measurement of the impacts of interventions on levels of cycling and physical activity is necessary not only to inform future strategy and policy but also to strengthen the case that promoting cycling represents extremely good value for money for both individual and public health."

And in an editorial published by Student BMJ today, two obesity experts ask, will the public health benefits of London's new cycle hire scheme outweigh risks such as exposure to traffic fumes and crashes?

Harry Rutter and Nick Cavill from the National Obesity Observatory say "there appears to be little evidence of the impact of these schemes, especially in terms of health." But they believe that "if Londoners swap their cars for human-powered transport, the benefits will greatly

outweigh the risks."

They conclude: "Policies such as congestion charging and the cycle hire scheme that contribute to a shift in the balance of urban traffic away from the car and towards [cycling](#) and walking have the potential to create major positive impacts on [public health](#) and wellbeing, not only in London, but in any town or city around the world."

Provided by British Medical Journal

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