

Can cycling improve mental health in old age?

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The University of Reading is asking for the local community's help for a study which will examine the mental health benefits for older people who regularly cycle.

Cycling is known to be very important for [older people](#) - not only as a positive effect on their health but as a potential way of retaining a sense of independence. However while [cycling](#) accounts for 23% of all journeys for people aged 65 and older in the Netherlands, 15% in Denmark and 9% in Germany, it represents only 1% all journeys in the UK.

The research team is looking for volunteers over the age of 50 who are not regular cyclists to take part in an eight week study. First, participants will be interviewed on the role of cycling, however limited, in their lives. The interview may then be followed up by a visit to the University to complete well-being questionnaires and conduct a series of computerised cognitive tasks which assess memory, attention and speed of thinking.

They will then be asked to cycle for half an hour, three times a week, before conducting the same tests after the eight week period. This will provide researchers with important feedback on the mental health benefits of cycling.

The study, which began last year, has yielded some interesting feedback but the researchers now need a second wave of volunteers to continue their work.

Dr Carien Van Reekum, from the University of Reading's Department of Psychology, said:

"Our current research focuses on cognitive and emotional changes when people get older, and how these changes impact on well-being. A number of recent studies have shown that regular physical exercise is one of the key factors in maintaining, or even improving, thinking and reasoning in older age.

"The team is focusing on whether incorporating cycling into everyday chores, such as getting from home to work or the shops, may positively contribute to having good [mental health](#) in older age. Feedback from our first wave of volunteers suggests all participants benefited from being involved in the trial, with most continuing to cycle even after completing the project with us. This an excellent opportunity for local people to rediscover the joys and benefits of cycling while contributing to the next phase of this important study."

Reading is one of four areas in the UK that will benefit from the three year project which being funded from a share of a £1.2 million grant from three UK research councils.

Volunteers receive free cycle training and a free bike check. Participants will also have the opportunity to try a Raleigh electrically assisted bike.

More information: To find out more or to volunteer visit the Cycleboom website: www.cycleboom.org/

Provided by University of Reading

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