

Cycling

Two wheels good: a beginner's guide to commuting by bike

Keen to avoid overcrowded buses and tubes and arrive to work brimming with endorphins? Here are some tips to cycling to work, safely and stylishly



▲ Drivers will see you more easily in bright clothes but Lycra is optional. Photograph: Alamy


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Have you ever noticed how cheerful your cycling colleagues are when they arrive at work in the morning? That's because their

 commute is quicker and cheaper, they are full of endorphins from the exercise, and they have avoided being crammed on to hot, overcrowded public transport.

The good news is it's actually very easy to follow their lead. Commuting by bike is an intimidating prospect for a lot of people, but it shouldn't be. A surprisingly small amount of kit is required, starting, unsurprisingly, with a bicycle.

If you own one already, use that. Just make sure you check that there is air in the tyres and that the brakes are in good condition, particularly if you haven't ridden it recently. Ask a cycling buddy to help, book it in for a service at your local bike shop, or find a tutorial on YouTube - basic bike maintenance is easy, even for total beginners.



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If you don't own a bike, consider a local cycle hire scheme. With 11,500 bikes, London's [Santander Cycles](#) is the biggest in the country, but bikeshare systems are spreading, from [nextbike](#) in Glasgow, which is expanding this autumn, to [Mobike](#) and [Ofo](#), which launched this summer in Manchester and Cambridge respectively and are set to expand further.

The government's Cycle to Work scheme, meanwhile, offers big savings on the price of a new bike: your employer buys the bicycle, which you then "hire" from them through salary sacrifice (the savings come from the fact that you're not paying tax and NI on the fees), and you buy it outright at the end of the 12-month hire period.

Once you have your bike sorted, there are a few other things to consider, in terms of clothing, accessories, and staying safe on the road. Front and back lights are a must - USB-chargeable ones avoid the hassle of changing batteries and are more environmentally friendly.

If you choose to wear a helmet, brands like Bern, Sawako and Bobbin specialise in stylish models you won't be embarrassed to be seen in. Helmet hair is unavoidable, but a can of dry shampoo in your desk drawer solves that problem. A pack of biodegradable baby wipes are also handy if you can't shower at work.

Drivers will see you more easily in bright clothes but there is no need to invest in a wardrobe full of Lycra. Wear whatever is comfortable - although long floaty skirts or wide-legged trousers are best avoided as they can get caught in the chain. Slip-on shoes can be hard to pedal in too, but pretty much anything else will work just fine. To avoid getting mucky en route, make sure your bike is fitted with mudguards, and if your workwear is too restrictive to cycle in, consider leaving a couple of outfits at the office that

relative to cycling, consider leaving a couple of items at the office that you can change into. A pair of padded shorts, though not essential, will make long commutes more comfortable.



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Panniers or a basket are easy to fit and convenient to use. A rucksack gives more flexibility, but it's no fun arriving at work with a sweaty back and sore shoulders. It's good to get into the habit of carrying a puncture repair kit and bike pump, particularly if your commute takes you through sparsely populated areas - in big cities you are probably OK without a repair kit, given the number of friendly independent bike shops that provide free-to-use pumps.

Another invaluable bit of kit are [bone-conducting](#)

[headphones](#) that allow you to listen to music or podcasts as you cycle but still hear everything around you.

Your first commute can be scary, but advance planning helps. A route planning app like [CycleStreets](#) provides three options to choose from: the fastest route, the quietest route, or a balance of the two. Do a practice run on a day when you are not in a hurry, ideally not at rush hour, so you know what to expect, and take it easy the first few times you cycle to and from work. Or consider breaking up a long commute at first - cycling part of the way, leaving your bike at a station and taking public transport for the rest of the journey.

There is no right way to commute by bike, and it's not all or nothing. [Cycling](#) to work even once a twice a week will still save you time, make you healthier and open your eyes to aspects of your town or city you never noticed before.

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17 Sep 2017

103



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17 Sep 2017

353



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17 Sep 2017

70

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Guardian Pick

I commuted by bicycle for many years and over many different distances and terrains. The bike is a lot less important than it's condition. The clothes are a LOT more important than you might think. Lights, bell, panniers and repair kit+knowledge are mandatory. I wouldn't bother commuting by bike unless the journey was 30 minutes or more. Your employer's support and work facilities can make a massive difference to your bicycle survival and persona...

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Guardian Pick

I'd add to the list a pair of gloves. Fingerless in the summer and full length in the winter. Cycling with cold, blistered hands is pretty miserable

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