

FITNESS

Is Cycling To Work Really As Easy As It Sounds?

On Her Bike: I felt like a failure when I couldn't commit to riding to the office.



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Now the mornings are lighter, the weather is warmer and spring feels less than an arm stretch away, I'm wondering whether to rethink my decision about not cycling to work. I

I tried to cycle to work once. I tried one and a half times, in fact. Neither of those times I actually needed to be at work - both attempts were on a weekend to see if I could complete the journey to the office away from the stress of the typical, weekday, early morning rush.

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On my first attempt, I went with a cycling instructor from my local council. He suggested, during some skills sessions he was doing with me ([which you can read about here](#)), he would cycle with me to my office and back to show me two different routes. I took him up on the offer. The cycle took one hour. It was a 10-mile ride (my commute to work on public transport takes 45 minutes door-to-door) and I felt exhausted by the time I reached the office.



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The home was much more scenic.

It was long, tough at times (at one point I battled a large roundabout with big red busses), and I felt it was only going to be worse on an actual weekday morning. We cycled home a different route and I enjoyed it slightly more, probably down to the fact there were segregated cycle lanes for a lot of it. After the two-hour round trip, my instructor turned and said to me: "That'll be so good for you if you cycle to and from work every day". I smiled and agreed, feeling slightly bad that I knew deep down I wouldn't do it. I wanted to love it, though. I wanted to cycle to work every day and feel fit, healthy and save money. But I just didn't enjoy it. I felt like a failure. Isn't cycling to work the goal all cyclists should aim for?

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Perhaps not, though, because despite the number of people cycling, the cycle to work figures seem low. In the last Government census, 741,000 working residents aged 16-74 cycled to work. Although it was an increase of 90,000 on the previous census, the share of cycling to work compared to other modes was just 2.8%. During this census, the number of people living in London who cycled to work more than doubled (from 77,000 to 155,000). Brighton, Bristol, Manchester, Newcastle and Sheffield also saw increases. Interestingly, in Cambridge, 29% of working residents reported a cycle-commute, a higher rate than any other local authority.

My second (half) attempt to cycle to work was on my own. It was less successful because I got lost around 5 miles in (FYI relying completely on Google maps is never a great shout), cut it short, cycled along the Thames and forgot all about my mission to cycle to work. I enjoyed the ride home again. I decided to give up on the cycle to work dream.





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we now have a sat nav on my bike.

My friend Sarah is probably about two years ahead of me in cycling. She also has a basket bike and went from never cycling at all in London, to doing a few trips, to now cycling to work. "Cycling to work gives me the freedom, independence and flexibility to travel exactly where and when I want, not having to worry about rush hour on the tube where you can't even squeeze on a carriage," she told me when I asked her about it. "When I'm tempted to get the tube if I'm tired or it's cold, as soon as I am stuffed on a sweaty carriage on the central line I instantly regret it.

"I am lucky to have a commute which is majority across parks and the canal. Cycling through a sunny park on a warm summer's morning is the best feeling ever. When I first moved to London I never imagined I would be cycling everyday across central London. Now I couldn't imagine my life without a bike. I'd encourage everyone to cycle to work - even if it's just in summer time, or once a week, or cycle half of your commute to a train station!"

I also spoke to Adrian Wills, who works for [Cycling UK](#), about the idea of cycling to work, after he previously told me his old commute was a 40-mile round trip cycle (and I thought my 20 miles was too long). "At the time, I'd already been riding reasonable distances at the weekends for fitness and pleasure, but took the plunge and never looked back, enjoying the extra levels of fitness the commute gave me," he said. "It quickly became clear that

there was another, unforeseen benefit in that it was helping me deal with stress. After a long day in a high-pressure environment, the ride home was great for clearing my head. After five minutes on my bike, through the back lanes of Kent, everything that had happened in the office was forgotten." Now, Adrian still cycles, but his commute is a lot shorter at 10 miles (the ideal distance if you ask me).

Adrian's reduction of stress is one of the many benefits of cycling to work. As well as a mental boost, Stanford University School of Medicine researchers found cycling to work helped people sleep better. They asked sedentary insomnia sufferers to cycle for 20-30 minutes every other day. The result? The amount of time the insomniacs took to fall asleep was reduced by half and the time they spent asleep increased by almost an hour a night.

If I want to reap the benefits, I know I have to try again - so watch this space.

Do you cycle to work? Do you love it? Endure it? Did you try and not enjoy it like me? I'd love to hear your cycling tales, email me at amy.packham@huffpost.com.

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