Cycling to work could help you live longer and greatly reduces the chance of developing cancer, study reveals

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They are often derided as Mamils (middle-aged men in Lycra), but a new study suggests Britain’s [urban cyclists](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/2017/01/23/avoid-tight-lycra-ageing-cyclists-warned/)will have the last laugh.

[Cycling](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/recreational-cycling/5-shortcuts-increase-cycling-speed-olympic-road-track-rider/)to work lowers the risk of dying early by 40 per cent, and reduces the chance of developing cancer by 45 per cent.

Similarly a daily bike ride to the office nearly halves the risk of heart disease, according to a major study by the [University of Glasgow](http://www.gla.ac.uk/), who tracked the health of more than a quarter of a million people over five years.

Over the study period 37 people in the cycling group died, but the researchers say the findings suggest that 63 would have died if they had all commuted by car or public transport. The findings held true for both men and women.

Just four per cent of adults cycle to work each day, around two million people.

Dr Jason Gill, from the institute of cardiovascular and medical sciences at Glasgow University, said the Government must do more to make cycling safer and more popular.

“Cycling all or part of the way to work was associated with substantially lower risk of adverse health outcomes.

“If these associations are causal, these findings suggest that policies designed to make it easier for people to commute by bike, such as cycle lanes, city bike hire, subsidised [cycle](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/news/10866273/Cycle-helmets-are-useless-says-brain-surgeon.html)purchase schemes and increasing provision for cycles on public transport may present major opportunities for public health improvement.”

Walking to work was also found to be good for health, although it does not offer the same benefits as taking a bike. Commuting on food was associated with a 27 per cent lower risk of developing cardiovascular disease and a 36 per cent lower risk of dying from it. Overall walking to work lowered the risk of early death by 27 per cent.

But there was no link with a lower risk of cancer or dying early from any cause in walkers, the study found.

People who preferred to stroll to work also had to walk for two hours a week in total to see health benefits, at an average speed of three miles per hour.

Experts behind the study, published in the [British Medical Journal (BMJ)](http://www.bmj.com/content/357/bmj.j1456), said the lower benefits seen for walking compared to cycling could be due to the fact cyclists covered longer distances in their commutes than the walkers, cycling is a higher intensity exercise and cyclists were generally more fit.

Dr Carlos Celis-Morales, from the University of Glasgow, said: "Walking to work was associated with lower risk of heart disease, but unlike cycling was not associated with a significantly lower risk of cancer or overall death.

"This may be because walkers commuted shorter distances than cyclists, typically six miles per week, compared with 30 miles per week, and walking is generally a lower intensity of exercise than cycling."

The study also found some health benefits if people cycled part of their journey and took public transport or drove the rest of the way.

The people taking part in the research were aged 52 on average at the start of the study and were followed for five years.

Professor Lars Bo, an expert in sports science from the [Western Norwegian University of Applied Sciences](https://www.hvl.no/en/) in Bergen, Norway, said the UK government must do far more to help people cycle or walk to work.

“The UK has neglected to build infrastructure to promote cycling for decades and the potential for improvements to increase cycling and the safety of cycling is huge,” he said.

“Cities such as Copenhagen have prioritised cycling by building bike lanes; tunnels for bikes, so cyclists do not need to pass heavy traffic; and bridges over the harbour to shorten travel time for pedestrians and cyclists. Today, no car or bus can travel faster than a bike through Copenhagen.

“The findings from this study are a clear call for political action on active commuting, which has the potential to improve public health by preventing common (and costly) non-communicable diseases.

“A shift from car to more active modes of travel will also decrease traffic in congested city centres and help reduce air pollution, with further benefits for health.”