

The Benefits of Biking

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The good news: our air is cleaner, thanks to more fuel-efficient vehicles. The bad news: the EPA reports that cars and trucks still produce 25 percent of air-polluting emissions in the United States. So, in May, which was National Bike Month, I decided to start using my bike for transportation as often as possible.

It made sense—even though I work from home, like most Americans I use my car to run errands, go to appointments, and deliver my kids to their extracurricular activities. I knew I couldn't give up the car entirely, but most of my business takes place within three miles of my home. Actually, also according to the EPA, 40 percent of all car trips are less than two miles long, adding up to a thirty-minute walk or a fifteen-minute bike ride. I figured I could do that!

The idea of getting more exercise appealed to me too. As a writer, I sit all the time. Not long ago, the *New York Times* reported a study connecting sedentary lifestyles, including the time we spend sitting in vehicles, with poor health and shorter life spans. God made our bodies for moving, and I knew I needed to balance all that chair time. It made sense to make it part of my lifestyle rather than carving out several hours a week to drive to the gym. So, this spring I gave my Raleigh twenty-one-speed hybrid a

tune-up, cleaning and lubricating the chain and pumping up the tires. I also purchased a helmet, a mirror for added safety, a bike rack, and tire-changing gear, just in case. I was ready to roll.

Despite my long-held belief that I really *was* in shape, at the beginning I noticed lots of aching muscles. I also learned that I don't have to pedal fast if I leave early, and I arrive at my destination less winded and less (ahem) fragrant. Working from home, I'm thankful for a relaxed wardrobe most of the time, but I frequently bike in "business casual" if I have an appointment with a client.

Besides wardrobe strategy, I had to rethink my schedule. Rather than making lots of mind-numbing stops throughout the week, now I try to consolidate all my "car" errands into a few trips, usually while I'm dropping off kids for their extracurricular activities. It takes extra work to stay organized, but in the long run I feel less harried. If I "trip-chain" all my usual errands into a single morning—bank, grocery, post office, pharmacy, library, hardware—I can get them all done in a fraction of the time it used to take me when I tried to squeeze a few of them in every day.

The family has had to adjust too—no more quick trips to Starbucks to satisfy the sudden urge for a Frappuccino. In fact, my girls now ride their

bikes to some nearby activities. So often we use our car for spontaneous and mostly frivolous entertainment. By biking more, we have more time, and we are definitely saving money. The EPA reports that people who telecommute, carpool, use public transportation, walk, or bike one day a week can save 1,200 miles on their vehicle and hundreds of dollars in driving and maintenance costs.

A friend of mine rides more than eight miles to and from her office every day. Besides shrinking her carbon footprint, she has a practical reason for riding as well: she and her husband share one car, and public transportation options are limited. There are other benefits to biking for her, though, especially avoiding traffic congestion.

"Now that I've been doing this for almost nine months, I realize how much it keeps me sane," she says. "I can work out problems from work in my head before I get home, and vice versa. I don't have the option to roll over and sleep instead of going for a run in the early morning, so I'm suddenly a lot more consistent in my exercise."

Now that summer's here, consider giving bike-commuting a try. It will clear the air, your mind, and maybe even your arteries! ■

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