



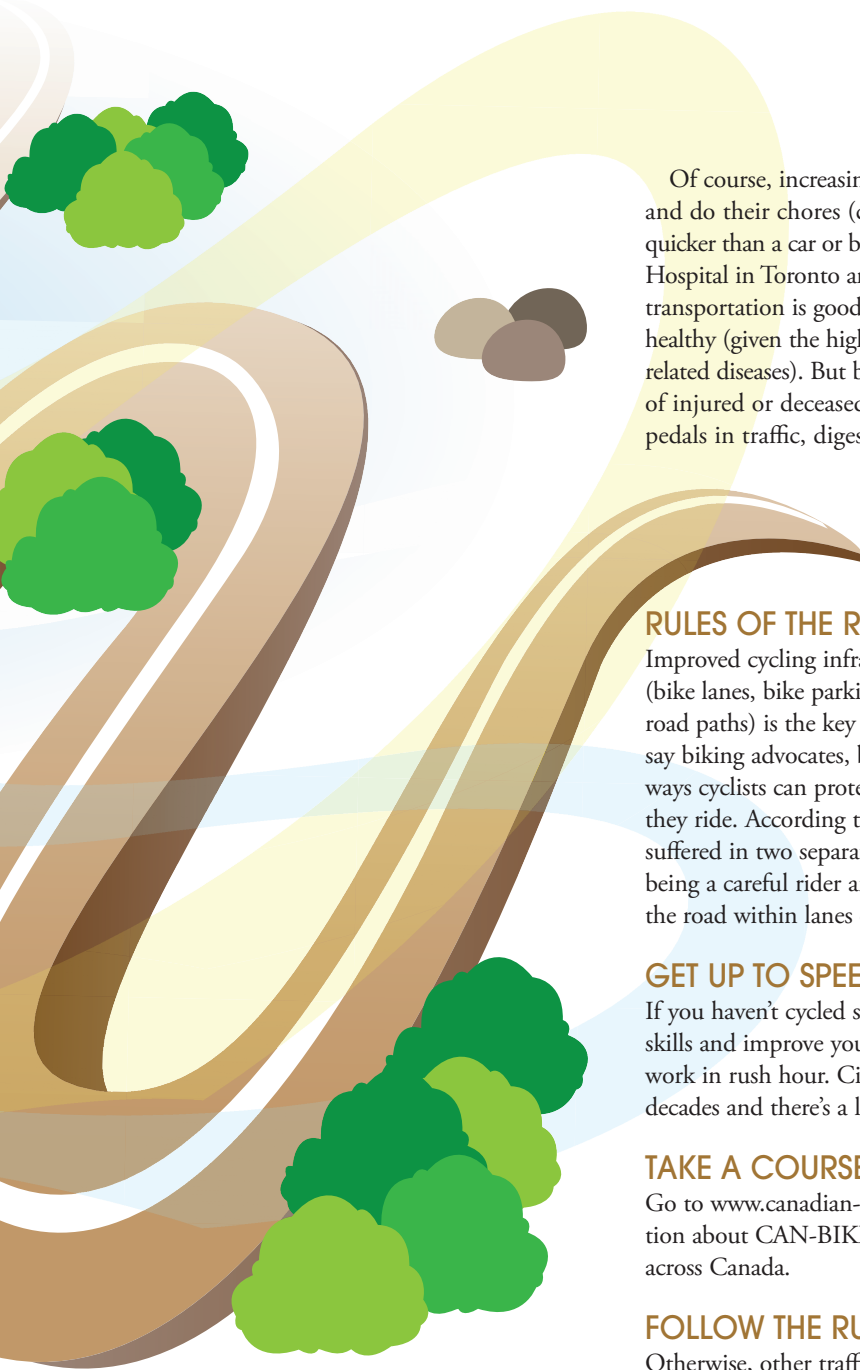
Cycle-ogical Thriller

Few things can match the cheap and simple high of pedal pushing into the warm spring wind **Ylva van Buuren**

Last spring, Kemp Stewart, 63, dusted off his old Peugeot and started cycling a few times a week. Kemp, who owns Hillier Creek Estates winery in Prince Edward County, wanted to improve his health and fitness after a health scare (he was treated for angina) and wanted to lose 30 pounds. Retired from the military, Kemp was always fit, but, he says “My knees and back had taken a beating. Cycling was a logical thing to do because it’s low impact yet can be as high intensity as you want.”

As it turns out, Kemp got more than he bargained for. When a friend suggested he join a local bike club, he signed up for a few of the weekly rides and got to know a whole network of bike friends. Before long, he was commandeering a new lightweight road bike (he wanted to keep up), and he found himself enjoying the camaraderie of it all, including stops at local coffee shops with bike buddies, as much as he enjoyed the rides themselves.

By October, Kemp was biking six times a week, his new odometer stood at 3,000 kilometres, and he had lost the weight. But the



Of course, increasingly, Canadians are also using their bikes to get to work and do their chores (cycling is cheap, active transportation and sometimes quicker than a car or bus). Dr. Chris Cavacuiti, a staff physician at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto and an experienced cyclist and bike advocate, says active transportation is good for the environment and good for helping keep people healthy (given the higher rates of obesity, type 2 diabetes and other lifestyle-related diseases). But biking is not without its risks, as the almost daily reports of injured or deceased cyclists will attest. So before you start pushing those pedals in traffic, digest these safety tips.

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RULES OF THE ROAD

Improved cycling infrastructure (bike lanes, bike parking and off-road paths) is the key to cycling safety, say biking advocates, but there are many ways cyclists can protect themselves when they ride. According to Cavacuiti, who is still recuperating from injuries suffered in two separate bike accidents, "You have to find a balance between being a careful rider and being confident enough to claim adequate space on the road within lanes of traffic and around parked cars."

GET UP TO SPEED

If you haven't cycled since you were a kid, give yourself time to regain your skills and improve your reaction time. Don't start off cycling to and from work in rush hour. City traffic has changed a lot in the past couple of decades and there's a lot of anti-cyclist rage out there.

TAKE A COURSE

Go to www.canadian-cycling.com/cca/education/canbike.shtml for information about CAN-BIKE programs (theory and practical training) held in cities across Canada.

FOLLOW THE RULES OF THE ROAD

Otherwise, other traffic and pedestrians will make incorrect predictions of what you're going to do next. Especially, do not cycle in the wrong direction on one-way streets!

SLOW DOWN

Says Victoria-based Denys Beames, author of *Taking the Road* (www.takingtheroad.com) and a national examiner for the CAN-BIKE program, "When you are riding fast, decision and reaction time in accident situations is reduced."

BEWARE OF PARKED CARS

Dooring, when a driver opens the car door and an oncoming cyclist hits it, is one of the most common causes of bike/car accidents. "It's usually a result of riding too close to parked cars," says Beames.

BE EXTRA ALERT AT RUSH HOUR

That's when most accidents occur.

best part? "Here was a fun, social way to stay fit and motivated," he says.

Cycling really is one of those perfect sports. It's easy to do (most of us learned as kids), keeps the heart and lungs tuned up and burns lots of calories with little impact on the joints. You can go as hard or as easy as you like, and, best of all, you feel like a kid again! Cycling helps reduce stress, and good form strengthens the core muscles of the trunk as well as the muscles in the legs.

A bike can also take you to neat places whether you cycle on designated paths or share a common road. You can join a club as Kemp did, cycle with friends or family or take a bike vacation.

WEAR BRIGHT CLOTHES

At night, car headlights pick up yellow best.

LIGHT UP

At night, use a white light on the front of your bike and a red light on the back. Don't use flashing lights, which may be confused with emergency-vehicle lights.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

- Proper working bike, with good tires, gears and brakes
- Fenders (to protect from road spray)
- Lights
- High-quality, properly fitting helmet
- Reflective clothing
- Padded bike shorts/pants
- Bell or horn (let pedestrians know you're coming, too)
- Rain gear
- Panniers
- Lock
- Pump and patch kit
- Special cycling shoes (optional): attach to the pedals via a clip-in system to help improve the efficiency of the pedal stroke (the pull-up is as efficient as the push-down)
- Good attitude: don't cowboy with motorists or bully pedestrians!



CYCLING PREP

Strength, core and balance training complement cycling. "Your power comes from your body's core," says Kim Lavender, director of team training at GoodLife Fitness in Belleville, Ont. "And, if you don't have balance, you can't produce power properly." Yoga, strength-training classes and stability-ball work will all help to boost your trunk muscles.

STRETCHING

Lavender recommends these stretches after cycling to help prevent sore muscles. Hold each one for five to 10 seconds.

• **Hip Flexors** (the muscles at the front of your hips that lift your legs) Kneel on the ground with one leg forward and bent. Tuck your hips under and tighten your abdominal muscles — you should feel a stretch between the knee and the hip bone. Hold, then switch sides.

• **Hamstrings** (the muscles at the back of the thighs) Stand and extend one leg up onto a riser or a step. Keeping the elevated (front) leg straight as you bend the back leg, tip forward from the hips. Focus on lifting your behind, keeping your abdominal muscles tight and your back flat. You should feel a stretch along the back of the extended leg. Hold, then switch sides.

• **Quadriceps** (muscles at the front of the thighs) Stand on one leg and flex the opposite knee behind you, holding the foot in

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Denys Beames, author of *Taking the Road* (www.takingtheroad.com) and a national examiner for the CAN-BIKE program, loves riding the Old Island Highway (a quiet low-traffic road) on Vancouver Island. As you skirt the coast from Parksville, 40 kilometres north of Nanaimo, to Campbell River, there are glorious beaches, views of Hornby, Denman and other islands, and a backdrop of snow-capped coastal mountains across the water.

ALBERTA

A simple city route in Calgary is the 15-kilometre paved path around the Glenmore Reservoir, says Steven Curson, a communications professional. On sunny summer days, enjoy sparkling waters, shady forest stretches and the echoing blast of the SS *Moyie* paddlewheeler's horn. Stop for coffee at Glenmore Landing.

your hand. Focus on lengthening the thigh from the knee to the hip. Hold, then switch sides.

• **Iliotibial Band** (a thick band of tissue on the outer thigh that helps to stabilize the knee during cycling or running)

Stand beside a wall and support yourself with one arm. Cross the opposite leg in front of one leg, just above the ankle, with both your feet on the floor. Push your hip toward the wall. Hold, then switch sides.

• **Chest**

Stand up straight, clasp your hands together behind your lower back. As you push your chest forward, pull back and up with your arms until you feel a comfortable stretch. Hold.

CYCLING CLASS

Group cycling classes are still all the rage in fitness clubs. Kim Lavender, director of team training at GoodLife Fitness in Belleville, Ont., likens the workout to meditation in motion. "The instructor helps you focus, often linking the ride to your real life, such as a goal you're working toward. It's about climbing a virtual mountain and reaching success."

Some recommended routes



QUEBEC

According to www.laurentians.com/parclineaire, le P'tit Train du Nord is an old railroad line-turned recreational trail between Bois-des-Filion and Mont-Laurier in Quebec. The 230-kilometre corridor cuts through the magnificent Laurentian region with lots of delicious stops along the way.

ONTARIO

Manitoulin Island is a wonderful nature and culture destination, says Neluka Leavage of www.geotrail.ca (a website that helps you locate, plan and navigate active outdoor experiences). Along the way: pristine inland lakes, wild fields, forests, farms and gorgeous sandy bays along Lake Huron.

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Milke Connolly, executive director at Cycling PEI, says the rugged 300-kilometre North Cape Coastal Drive offers a unique blend of sightseeing, natural attractions, cultural experiences and engaging people. Included: North America's longest rock reef, as well as the Black Marsh Trail, a bilingual nature trail. And be warned: it's one of the windiest areas in Canada! Be sure to visit the Wind Energy Interpretative Centre.

For other great ideas, go to The Trans Canada Trail (www.tctrail.ca) or www.canadatrails.ca/biking, which both provide routes by province.