

# Starting young puts you on road to a healthy life

**C**ycling is a life skill – once you've learnt how to do it, it's something that stays with you forever.

My memories of childhood revolved around cycling. As an auntie and a stepmother, I think it is important that we give children the chance to learn how to cycle safely and independently.

I like to think it embodies everything that's good about being healthy and I always promote that to all the children that visit and stay at our home. In fact, we have a selection of bikes for the very purpose!

Children love the freedom cycling offers. We have a mile circuit around the hamlet and watching the children whiz around it trying to beat each other is lovely. Initially my husband and I would take them out and teach the basics until they had the confidence to go it alone.

This appears to buck the modern way of not allowing young children to get out there and understand their environment by exploring it. They need a little independence. We are lucky to live around quiet country lanes but the usual hazards still present themselves. Often motorists, on quieter roads, can forget to share the road itself and rural life does necessitate mudguards. Very muddy roads need careful handling and hedge cuttings need to be avoided – as I learnt at my cost.

As children we walked to school without our mother and I think we are better off for that.

**By Carol Westmorland**  
champion cyclist and Pilates instructor



Health and safety is enormous to me. My husband chuckles at the absurd scenarios I can come up with but I am confident that with good sense children can only benefit from being allowed to be trusted from an early age.

What prevents more parents allowing their children to ride their bikes out and about by themselves is the safety element.

According to research carried out by Cycling England, more than 75 per cent of parents do not allow their children to cycle by themselves and, whereas one in three parents cycled to school as children, only one in five allow their own children to do so.

I can understand why parents are afraid – our roads are getting busier and busier. So, we need to make them safer. More and better cycle paths, improved lighting and even cycle wardens along routes to schools. Wouldn't this be utopia? I am certain that parents would then allow their children to cycle. If a child has been trained and equipped properly with safety clothing, a helmet and bike lights, the dangers are greatly reduced.

In the New Year I am to become involved in Cycling England's Bikeability campaign. Bikeability is cycling proficiency for the 21st century. With the heart of my day clear I can't



**Pedal power:**  
Bikeability could help inspire a youngster to become a Tour de France hero like Britain's Bradley Wiggins

think of a better way to spend my time – outdoors in the fresh air sharing my passion for cycling with others. Right now there has never been a better time to become involved in sporting activities. The forthcoming London Olympics is a great inspiration and cycling has grown in profile in recent years.

In last year's Olympic Games alone, Britain won an incredible eight golds, four silvers and two bronzes. Who knows, I may stumble across the next Bradley Wiggins or Victoria Pendleton.

Sport is a fantastic way of encouraging a child's independence and plays a big part in our family. My nephew Oliver plays tennis and my niece Jemima loves to run. Our three-year-old nephews Finn and Theo will be encouraged onto the rugby field. It is about giving children the tools to build their resilience and skills so that by the time they reach 10 or 11 years old, they are not so fearful and can make informed choices.

Starting at about nine years old, children progress through

three levels, from basic bike handling skills to riding on quiet roads to going out in heavier traffic. Children normally complete the final level once they have started secondary school.

The scheme has received great acclaim. To date, 150,000 children have learned Bikeability through their schools and the aim is for that number to increase to 500,000 by 2012. For that to be achieved, though, they are in need of more instructors, and the current focus of the campaign is to recruit more than 1,000.

After staying at home to bring up small children, mums wishing to return to work may find it daunting. I see it all the time whilst teaching Pilates; women are transformed when they rediscover 'me' time. As primary carers in the family, women tend to get left behind and can need a lot of motivation to bring out the best in them, especially those who are returning to work. This is why becoming an instructor for Bikeability may well be a great opportunity.

Bursaries are available and the chance to earn up to £20,000 a year for such a worthwhile job.

It would be wonderful to see more and more children cycling to school en masse. If you have ever been involved in a charity cycle ride you will notice how it unites people. Rather like the aspirations of the future Olympians the goal is only going to be achieved if those willing to become involved work hard and build on its success.

What better way to start 2010 than with a big push?

## I get a better workout now but I still sing the praises of my old gym

I'VE never been a big fan of exercise purely for the sake of keeping fit; normally, if I'm doing something active such as walking, kayaking or cycling, the exercise/fitness aspect of it is simply an unintentional by-product.

When I was at school, I could never see the point of activities such as circuit-training. Badminton, I loved! Hockey, great! Even the occasional cross-country run. But why would anyone want to plough up and down a noisy swimming-pool that stinks of chlorine? Or run round and round a school field countless times?

Having said that, for the past 20-something years, I have been a fairly 'regular' gym-goer.

Last summer, feeling that that regularity needed regulating, I

**Guidebook writer Vivienne Crow shares her love of the great outdoors**



decided to bite the bullet and join a private gym. My thinking was that, if I was paying for membership, I would feel I had to go more often to ensure I was getting value for money. Also, said private gym has the benefit of being just a five-minute walk from home, so not wanting to face the traffic in Carlisle city centre was no longer an excuse.

For years I'd been going to the cosy, council-run gym above the Victorian Turkish Baths on James Street – and I'd grown quite fond of it. I could go in the early evening and have the place to myself – just me and the radio. I'd

gently pedal or row or jog while singing along loudly to Robbie Williams or Beyonce or whoever else CFM was playing. It was a soothing way to unwind.

I didn't need to feel self-conscious if I got entangled in pulleys and weights while trying out a new machine, there was no one to frown at me if all I was doing was singing, and the odd glance in the mirror to check my hair was totally guilt-free.

I didn't need to do much to work up a sweat either, because of the steam from downstairs.

The private gym is quite different... Being surrounded by dozens of people, all dripping with sweat and groaning with exertion, is kind of contagious – I feel the need to pedal just that little bit harder now.

As for the singing – well, I don't

want to get a reputation for being that crazy woman who's always singing. (Not that I have enough breath for anything more than quiet humming now.)

But there's still entertainment to be had. – and I'm not referring to the TV screens that adorn each of the machines. I'm talking about the teenage girls who whizz round the room like people possessed, spending 30 seconds on each machine so that they can do a bit of everything in one hour; or the man who makes, well, let's say 'inappropriate' noises as he works out on the cross-trainer.

So, am I getting value for money? Well, I go more often and I do work a lot harder, so I'm probably getting more out of it. I miss the singing, but I guess I can still do that on the fells...

