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Imagine taking your trusty old three-speed—or your rugged new mountain bike—onto the open road for an exhilarating 40-minute ride. It's a beautiful day . . . there's a gentle breeze . . . and before you know it, you're back home, tired but refreshed from a workout that seemed more like fun than work.

The simple pleasure of riding a bicycle is so appealing that this traditional pastime has been revived as a hot new way to exercise *indoors*—where weather, traffic, terrain and plain old lack of motivation are less likely to foil your good intentions.

Indoor cycling classes are popping up in gyms and studios around the world. If you haven't witnessed the real thing, no doubt you've seen the advertisements: groups of exercisers huddled over stationary bikes, looking determined and even a little euphoric as they listen intently to an instructor and pedal their hearts out. Have you ever wondered about joining them?

Are You Ready for Indoor Cycling?

Taking Your First Indoor Ride

Feel a little intimidated at the thought of trying a class? You're not alone. "The most common misconception is that indoor cycling is an intense, overwhelming experience that only the very fit can handle," says San Diego certified Spinning® instructor Jill Flyckt. "I tell newcomers to remember they're in charge of their own ride. They set the pace and they do it *privately*—unlike in other classes where everyone can see if they make a wrong step."

Ultra-endurance cyclist, motivational trainer and internationally acclaimed fitness expert Johnny G, who created the original Spinning program that sparked the indoor cycling trend, says, "The beauty of indoor cycling is that you set your own level of intensity by adjusting the bike's resistance, so your age, size and fitness level don't matter. The goal is to help you find the champion within."

Fitness experts agree that indoor cycling is an excellent cardiovascular workout, providing the same health and weight management benefits as other aerobic activities. It is particularly versatile because it's a nonimpact activity, ideal for postrehab patients, pre/postnatal women and people with overuse injuries, back pain or arthritis.

The most unique aspect of indoor cycling may be its special brand of motivation. Continuous coaching, music and visualization (which transports you to some imaginary terrain, such as a mountain or the wilderness) help you achieve your personal best. "It's about physical, mental and emotional development,"

says Johnny G. "You can learn how to challenge yourself, overcome obstacles and build inner strength to reach your goals."

What to Expect

Classes often last 40 to 45 minutes, but some beginner sessions are only 30 minutes. Your instructor may speak to you through a speaker system or through headphones you wear during class. Various types of cycling programs and bikes are available.

Here are answers to two common questions:

Will I get "big quads" from indoor cycling? Your muscle size is a matter of genetics; it depends on your parents, not your cycling class.

Will I get really sore? Soreness and muscle ache in the quadriceps, lower legs and pelvis are common after your first classes, but will diminish if you keep cycling two or three times a week.

Tips for Getting Started

To help you ease into the indoor cycling experience, remember the following:

Take Control of Your Ride. Don't "come out of the gate" too fast. This is the most common mistake beginners make. Pace yourself!

Come Prepared. Wear comfortable clothes, including padded bike shorts and low-top shoes with stiff midsoles (cross trainers or cycling shoes). Bring plenty of water and a towel.

Talk to Your Instructor. Describe your fitness history, goals and injuries. Ask about proper posture and learn how to adjust resistance and speed. Make sure your seat height and angle are correct.

Make a Commitment. Don't let initial discomforts scare you off. Try this activity for several weeks, rather than giving up too soon. Indoor cycling may provide just the boost your fitness program needs—so get on your bike and ride! ♦

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