

# cycling training guide



Training is very specific to the activity that you are undertaking. Therefore to become fitter for cycling, you need to cycle. This can be mixed up with some cross training of your favourite sport or outdoor activity i.e. swimming, aerobics, climbing, running, squash etc.

Most training should be part of an ongoing lifestyle but if this is not the case then you should begin training 4 – 6 months prior to the challenge. If you are very unfit and this is the first time you have ever undertaken a long distance cycle challenge, then this time may need to be extended.

## why bother training?

- You will have a far better chance of completing the challenge.
- You will enjoy the cycling challenge far more if you have a good level of fitness.
- You are far less likely to become injured if you know how to correctly cycle long distances.
- It will allow you to prepare mentally for the cycling challenge.
- It strengthens your heart, reducing the risk of heart attack and stroke.
- It will improve your circulation, breathing and endocrine functions.
- It tones muscles and strengthens bones, reducing the risk of osteoporosis.
- It reduces blood fat and cholesterol.
- It burns calories and helps you manage your weight.
- It boosts mental performance and improves psychological well-being.

## how to avoid injuries whilst training and cycling

- To avoid saddle sores, it is important that you have the correct equipment. Buying a gel saddle may help but you will still need a proper pair of cycling shorts. The best ones on the market now provide a cool max material to stop any issues with long term wearing of lycra around the groin area. It is advisable to wear gloves to stop any blisters forming on the hands and a helmet is always advisable to be worn. If you get any hotspots whilst training (a rubbing of the skin which then feels warm) immediately stop training and apply a blister prevention kit (i.e. Compeed) to the affected area.
- When cycling on uneven terrain, remember to keep the pedals flat when coming downhill and raise the pedal on the side you are banking into to keep pedals free of any obstacles.
- Try to cycle with your head up and eyes focused ahead, anticipating the gears needed and any dangers ahead.

# 16 - 24 week training schedule



Again, one of the most important aspects of training is that you make it as specific as possible to the actual cycling expedition that you will be undertaking. This, of course, becomes difficult if you intend cycling at high altitude or in a very mountainous region and you live in Lincolnshire. There are however ways of overcoming this. If you intend cycling on steep gradients, then find a nearby hill and progress from cycling on the flat to, once a week, cycling the same distance on that hill. Alternatively, book a weekend away to an area with steeper gradient roads.

From the outset you should attempt to develop a consistent cadence (the speed at which your legs rotate per minute) that you are able to maintain. This will lead to improvements in your aerobic capacity and will strengthen your heart and lungs. This will allow your body to be less stressed when cycling or exercising and enable you to increase the distance during the training schedule. To develop your cadence you should select the gear that feels most comfortable when you are cycling on whatever gradient you are on. The optimum cadence for training is around 60 - 70 RPM which will aid the speed at which you become cycling fit and will increase your strength and stamina, which you can then build on. As you progress through the training weeks you will be able to select harder gears while maintaining the same RPM. As you become more comfortable with your cadence and riding position, you will be able to increase the mileage.

Try to have a rest day in between each training day if possible. Remember to warm up, stretch, then exercise, cool down and stretch to finish. The cross training, resistance training or spinning class evening can always be on the same day as the shorter 2 hour cycle.

The length of your training will depend upon your fitness level so if in doubt, seek professional advice from a fitness trainer at a local gym.

The training schedule below allows for each pair of weeks to be extended into 3 weeks and the first week to be extended into 2 weeks, thereby providing you with a 24 week / 6 month programme. If you are a novice cyclist, then use the 24 week programme to get into shape for your challenge; if you are moderately fit and a competent cyclist, then use the 16 week programme; if you are already a fit cyclist, then you should increase the length of the rides from 20 miles up to 50 miles and from week 1, start with one of the training cycle rides being on a steep gradient.

- week 1:** Source a good cycle circuit that you are happy with and provides you with the best fit for your expedition. 2 x 5 mile cycle rides. 1 x 10 mile cycle ride.
- week 2 & 3:** 2 x 5 mile cycle rides. 1 x 10 mile cycle ride.
- week 4 & 5:** 2 x 10 mile cycle rides. 1 x 15 mile cycle ride.
- week 6 & 7:** 2 x 15 mile cycle rides. 1 x 20 mile cycle ride.
- week 8 & 9:** 3 x 20 mile cycle rides (1 on steep gradient). 1 x 25 mile cycle ride (on the weekend).
- week 10 & 11:** 3 x 20 mile cycle rides (1 on steep gradient). 1 x 30 mile cycle ride (on the weekend).  
1 x cross training, resistance training or spinning class evening.
- week 12 & 13:** 3 x 25 mile cycle rides (1 on steep gradient). 1 x 35 mile cycle ride (on the weekend).  
1 x cross training, resistance training or spinning class evening.
- week 14 & 15:** 3 x 30 mile cycle rides (1 on steep gradient). 2 x 40 mile cycle ride (on the weekend - use the weekend to see how the body copes with two days of cycling one after the other as on the expedition). 1 x cross training, resistance training or spinning class evening.
- week 16:** 3 x 10 mile cycle rides. 1 x cross training, resistance training or spinning class evening.

# 10 top tips for training



The above 16 week / 24 week programme is only a rough training guide and we at Charity Challenge are very aware that other commitments such as work, family and fundraising may not allow you to stick rigidly to the schedule. However, in order to get close to achieving the training it is very important to organise your time properly and prioritise your goals with regards this once in a lifetime expedition. Some ideas that have worked for other challengers are:

1. Get up an hour earlier and go out for a quick cycle in the morning before work.
2. If you can cycle to work, do so. If you get to work by public transport, get off a stop or two earlier than usual, so that you can cycle some distance each day. If you drive, park further away than usual, get the cycle out of the car and cycle the rest of the distance to work.
3. Cross training such as swimming, squash, badminton, running, walking and any other sport will also help get you prepared.
4. Joining a leisure centre is a good idea as the local fitness instructors may well be able to design a programme specifically for you using the many different cycle trainers in gyms. Most good gyms have exercise bikes and leg resistance trainers.
5. Book onto a regular spinning class and / or circuit training class to improve your leg strength and stamina.
6. Book weekends away with the family or friends to some mountainous region in the UK to experience cycling on different road surfaces with different gradients and in a mountain environment to test out all your equipment.
7. Book onto the Pre-Expedition Training Weekends in Snowdonia run by Expedition Wise.
8. Turbo trainers are very good, although quite expensive to buy – try out e-bay. They come in to their own in the long winter months as they enable you to train indoors on a “real” bike. It will keep you fit and get you used to the shape of your bike. Fluid turbo trainers are quieter if noise is a problem in your household and changing the tyres to road tyres will help if you are using a mountain bike.
9. Use your lunchtimes to take regular brisk walks or cycle around your work area.
10. You should make the time to cycle on some consecutive long days as on the training schedule. It is the accumulation of cycling day after day that really tests you on expedition.

**These notes were compiled by Brian Jackson, BA (Hons) in Sport, Health and Physical Education, who operates a series of Pre-Expedition Training Weekends for both trekking and cycling charity challenges. See [www.charitychallenge.com](http://www.charitychallenge.com) for more information.**