



Staying physically active is easy: Cycling

Every physical activity counts!

Incorporating physical activity into your daily life by walking, cycling, climbing stairs, or doing housework or gardening – is good for your physical and mental health. The rule of thumb is: any activity is better than none and increases health and well-being at every age.

Cycling...

- increases well-being
- is healthy
- improves the air quality
- protects the environment
- is cheap and silent



Cycling: good for your health and the environment

Cycling is the ideal way to get around: not only does it promote physical and mental health and improve fitness, it also brings many advantages for the environment: cycling doesn't emit greenhouse gases, which is good for the climate and air quality. Cycling is also silent and thus reduces the noise level, which benefits the environment as well as societal health. In addition, the bicycle is one of the cheapest forms of transport and it saves space as, among other things, it reduces the area required for parking space.

Did you know? A parked car requires eight times more space and a travelling car 28 times more space than a bicycle.

Promoting physical and mental health

Cycling, along with walking or climbing stairs, is one of the most healthy everyday medium-intensity activities. Cycling trains the cardiovascular system, works the gluteal, thigh and calf muscles and improves physical fitness. The intensity and energy requirement varies according to the speed and upward gradient.



Chart 1: Medium-intensity area with examples.
Physical activity recommendations Switzerland
(Source : hepa.ch. Magglingen, FOSPO, 2022).

The even, cyclical movement in the fresh air also has a balancing effect and promotes mental health. In addition, the brain receives more oxygen when cycling, which improves concentration and memory performance.





Chart 2: Health benefits of walking and cycling
(Source: THE PEP, WHO, 2022)

Cycling to work: fewer sick days

A study from Germany shows that employees who cycle to work throughout the year are sick a lot less often (6.5 days per year) than employees who drive to work (11.5 days per year). Moreover, promotion of bicycle use improves employee health and boosts performance.

It thus makes sense for companies to support the active mobility of their employees through incentives, such as adequately sheltered bicycle parking, changing and showering facilities, sharing concepts or projects and challenges, such as bike to work..

Further information and a sample questionnaire for promoting cycling among employees (in French, German and Italian) : energieschweiz.ch/mobilitaet/velo/

Cycling: ideal for a sedentary lifestyle

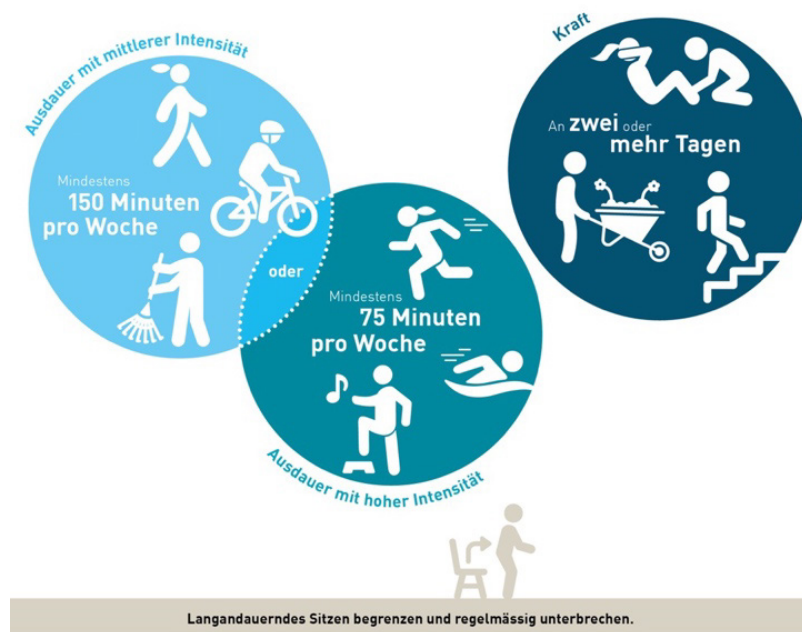
Cycling offers an easy way to be more active, especially for people who do not exercise much or at all and who normally spend a lot of time seated. Recommend starting with short routes and gradually increasing the frequency, duration and intensity until cycling becomes a routine activity, which people don't want to leave out of their daily routine.

Every step counts

Every move away from inactivity, in the form of prolonged sedentary spells for example, is worthwhile and good for your health, well-being, quality of life and physical capability – at every age.

Physical activity recommendations for adults (18-64)

Täglich empfohlene Bewegung für Erwachsene (18–64 Jahre)



The biggest health benefit comes from a minimum of 150 to 300 minutes of endurance-oriented, medium-intensity exercise (e.g. walking or cycling, gardening or housework) or a minimum of 75 to 150 minutes of high-intensity exercise (e.g. jogging, swimming, cross-country skiing, zumba) per week. Besides endurance, you should also do muscle-strengthening exercises of medium or high intensity at least twice per week.

Chart 3: Physical activity recommendations Switzerland, (Source: hepa.ch 2023)

Quelle: hepa.ch, Magglingen 2023

It's never too late to start pedalling, any activity is better than none!!

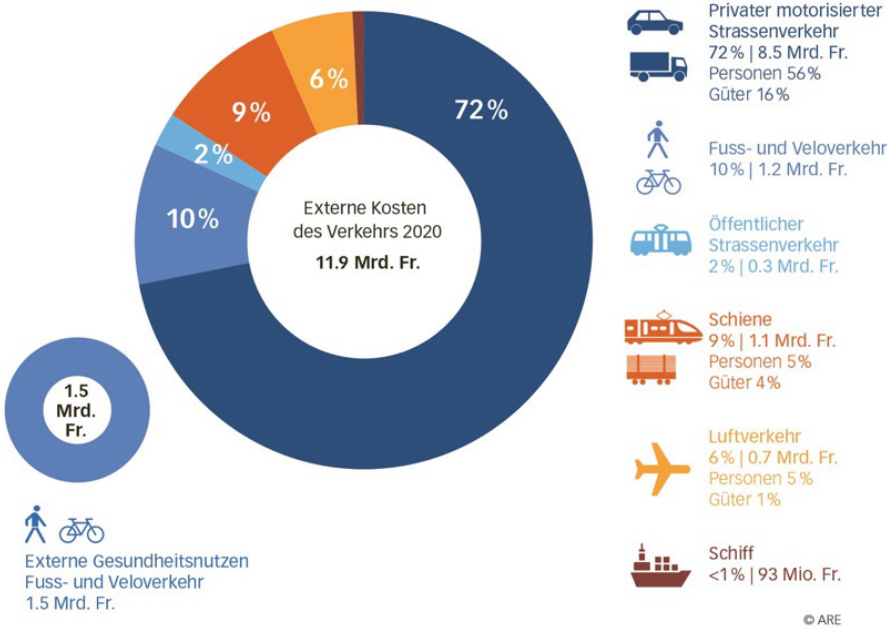
How come? Regular movement reduces the risk of many non-communicable conditions, such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases or cancer. These illnesses account for almost three-quarters of all fatalities in Switzerland. People who exercise a lot not only build muscle, but also strengthen their bones, joints, organs and immune systems. In addition, they see improvements in their memory, learning ability and quality of sleep. Physical activity also has a positive impact on mental well-being, social contacts and independence in old age.

More active mobility, lower health costs

Pedestrian and bicycle traffic is associated with **external health benefits** as compared to the externalities arising from motorised traffic and its concomitant health costs (see Chart 4).

Did you know? If every person in Switzerland were to spend **five minutes more cycling instead of driving** every day, annual health costs could be reduced by CHF 2,463 million.

Gesamte externe Kosten und Nutzen des Verkehrs 2020



External benefits are the opposite of externalities: a certain type of mobility creates a benefit that extends beyond the individual road user. Walking is a good example: the physical activity has a positive effect on society as a whole: fewer illnesses leading to more productive employees plus lower healthcare and social insurance costs

Chart 4: External costs and benefits of transport 2020 (Source: Federal Office for Spatial Development ARE)

Active mobility in Switzerland

Active mobility (cycling or walking) is particularly suited to short everyday journeys of under 10 km and offers many health, ecological, social and economic benefits.

In Switzerland, the average travel time by foot, bike or e-bike is 35 minutes per day and person (Federal Statistical Office, 2021). This figure has been stable since 2010. However, the number of stages and distance covered have (with the exception of the e-bike) decreased since 2015.

The bike and e-bike distances covered in 2021 combined come to 0.9 km per person and day (see Chart 5), which is about the same as in 2015. At the same time, there was a pronounced shift away from conventional bicycles to e-bikes.

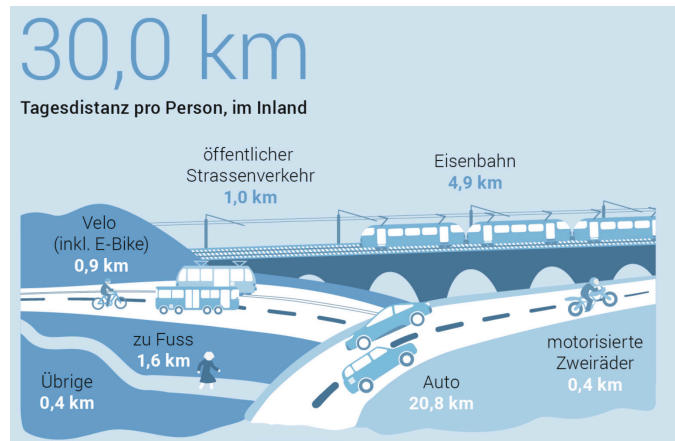


Chart 5: Daily distance per person in Switzerland (Source : Mobility and Transport Microcensus, Federal Statistical Office FSO 2021)

Travel by bike: save time and expense

Cyclists...

- usually reach their destination more quickly and easily;
- don't need to find a parking space;
- don't have to follow timetables;
- avoid waiting times and traffic jams;
- save money on petrol, parking fees, public transport and the gym, as they conveniently integrate physical activity into their daily routine.

An environment conducive to physical activity and social interaction

An environment conducive to physical activity and social interaction, such as the creation of sufficiently secure and attractive cycle paths as well as the offer of an easily accessible mobility concept (sharing models) encourages people to adopt a more active daily routine.

There are structural measures that can motivate the population to cycle more. In the omnibus survey “Health and lifestyle” by the Federal Office of Public Health, 73% of respondents said that continuous, secure cycle paths would encourage them to cycle more. Attractive deals for taking a bike on the bus/tram/train and having suitable spaces for bicycles in the bus/tram/train would motivate over 50% of respondents (see Chart 6).

Würden die folgenden Massnahmen Sie dazu motivieren, vermehrt zu Fuss zu gehen oder das Velo zu benutzen?

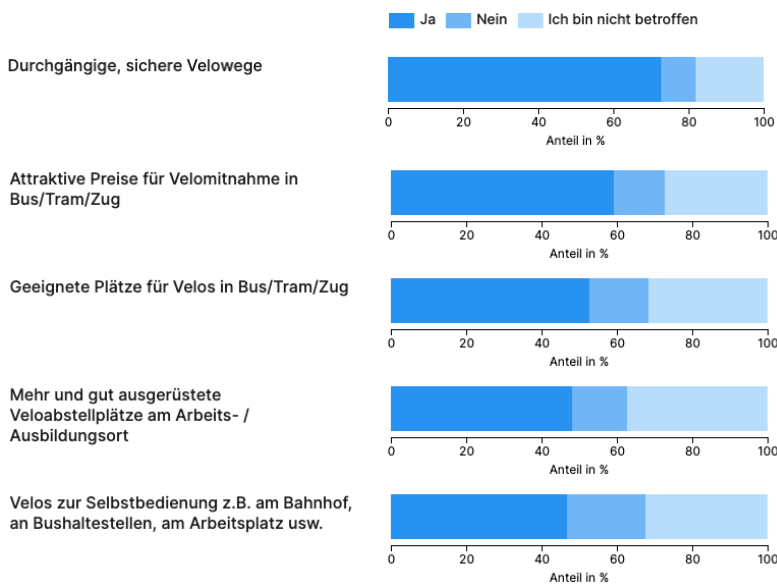


Chart 6 : Motivation to walk or cycle more (Source: «Active mobility – population’s opinion on structural measures (age:15+)», Obsan <https://ind.obsan.admin.ch/en/indicator/monam/active-mobility-populations-opinion-on-structural-measures-age15>)

Experience and inspiration for professionals

How must a city be organised to make cycling attractive? What solutions have the cities of Bern, Zurich and Bulle selected? And what contribution can, for example, separate cycle lanes make? The [Themenheft Stadt Land Velo](#) (available in French and German) by *Hochparterre* and *Velojournal* provides a valuable insight. The [Guide Vélo](#) also offers a range of helpful measures to promote cycling and helps implement the ‘Veloweggesetz’ (federal law on cycle paths).

The bicycle: tomorrow's mode of transport

Contemporary, pressing themes related to health, climate, energy, society are closely connected to the theme of **mobility**. The onus is therefore on all types of actors from the areas of health promotion, environment, energy, traffic, town planning, architecture, social environment, etc. as well as employers, to structure **everyday routes and commutes in a health-enhancing, climate friendly, social, cost effective, secure, target group and needs-oriented** way. The bicycle offers huge potential to achieve these goals and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Selection of further information and projects on the theme of cycling

- [Bike2school](#), Pro Velo Switzerland (in French, German and Italian)
- [Bike to work](#), Pro Velo Switzerland
- [Cycling for the Global Goals](#), United Nations
- [Cyclomania](#), Pro Velo Switzerland (in French, German and Italian)
- [DEFI VELO](#), promoting cycling among 13-20 year olds (in French and German)
- [Pro Velo Switzerland](#), umbrella organisation representing the interests of cyclists in Switzerland
- [Schule+Velo](#), Pro Velo Switzerland (in French, German and Italian)
- [Shared Mobility-Karte](#), EnergieSchweiz (in French, German and Italian)
- [Sicher Velo fahren](#), Swiss Council for Accident Prevention BFU (in French, German and Italian)
- [On the move by bike or e-bike](#), Energie Schweiz (in French, German and Italian)
- [Velo>Lab](#), (in French and German) inc. video on [Cycling, health & climate \(in German\)](#)
- [Veloland Schweiz](#), SchweizMobil

Sources

Federal Office of Sport FOSPO, Federal Office of Public Health FOPH, Health Promotion Switzerland, Swiss Council for Accident Prevention BFU, Health and Physical Activity Network Switzerland hepa. Physical activity recommendations Switzerland. Fundamentals Magglingen: FOSPO 2022.

Federal Statistical Office / Federal Office for Spatial Development (2023): Population's mobility behaviour. Results of the 2021 Mobility and Transport Microcensus, Neuchâtel and Bern. [Mobility and Transport Microcensus](#) (in French, German and Italian)

Federal Office for Spatial Development ARE, External costs and benefits of transport 2020. www.are.admin.ch/costs and benefits

Addiction and NCD monitoring system (MonAM), Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) and Swiss Health Observatory (Obsan).
<https://ind.obsan.admin.ch/monam/topic/1ERN?key=Bewegung>

Walking and cycling, the latest evidence, THE PEP, WHO, 2022 <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/354589/9789289057882-eng.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y>

These recommendations for daily physical activity were developed by the FOPH as part of the implementation of the NCD strategy (with the support of the Federal Office of Public Health, Health Promotion Switzerland and the Swiss Conference of Health Directors).

Federal Office of Public Health FOPH
Prevention of Non-communicable diseases Division

November 2024

