Com m entary

The article by Lamb and colleagues in this month’s Practical Diabetes is an encouraging exploration of the potential for active commuting through cycling to combat the alarming and growing global incidence of type 2 diabetes. This article draws on the large body of evidence demonstrating that, if we do move to the tune of the Department of Health recommendations, we minimise this risk of acquiring diabetes. More specifically, large-scale studies demonstrate cycling can reduce those cardio-metabolic factors that predispose an individual to diabetes.

Physical inactivity is a global killer. Upsetting the balance of energy expenditure to energy intake can predispose to obesity – a key driver for the development of diabetes. We live in a busy world and, more often than not, the occurrence of structured physical activity at gyms or fitness classes suffers when daily life pressures squeeze out the minimum amount of physical activity needed to maintain good health.

Active commuting to work is an answer to the above mentioned question, yet a complex number of individual barriers need to be overcome that facilitate continued cycle-commuting to make a change in one’s health. Pragmatic issues include environment, route safety, showering facilities at work, safe cycle storage and amount of commuting time compared to car, bus or train. For some, simply distance to workplace and/or dropping off kids to child-minding facilities will mean it is simply not a viable option. However, subtle factors can aid in encouraging cycling – like financial incentives, e.g. reduced VAT-cycle purchase schemes, or conversely financial disincentives like car park costs for employees, or simply inadequate numbers of car parking spaces. Employers need to take a more proactive role in encouraging cycling to their workplace as one might argue that, if sedentariness is a cause of diabetes, employing individuals with an eight-hour opportunity to sit in front of a computer screen should carry a health warning!

As we move forward in this diabesogenic century we need to find the solutions as to how government-driven initiatives work with employers to overcome barriers and encourage the mind of the individual to embrace cycling to work; as the body will then follow! When we sit at our offices by 9 am we need to be ready for work, not exhausted by the commute! I congratulate the authors for exploring the possibility to use cycling to fight diabetes.

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