

under control

bicycling, brisk walking help premenopausal women control weight

Premenopausal women who make even small increases in the amount of time they spend bicycling or walking briskly every day decrease their risk of gaining weight, according to a new study by researchers from the Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH).

For premenopausal women of any weight, riding a bicycle was effective in helping to maintain weight, and overweight and obese women appeared to benefit the most. The researchers found that even a small increase in bicycling time – as little as five minutes each day – helped to control weight.

Among the walkers who had increased their daily activity by an average of 30 min/day over the years, only those who walked briskly were able to control their weight. Walking slowly had no effect.

Study results showed that women in the study gained an average of 9.3 kilograms (20.5 pounds) over the 16-year period. Even though women gain weight as they age, normal-weight women who were bicycling more than four hours a week were 26% times less likely to gain more than five percent of their initial body weight. Overweight and obese women who were bicycling just two or three hours a week were 46% times less likely to gain weight.

According to the authors, it is the first study to look at the relationship between bicycling and weight control among women.

“This study shows that more bicycling predicts less weight gain,” said Rania Mekary, research associate in the HSPH Department of Nutrition.

“Small daily increments in bicycling helped women control their weight. But the more time women spent bicycling, the better. Women with excess weight appeared to benefit the most. This is encouraging for women with weight problems because they could substitute bicycling for slow walking or car driving,” said Mekary.

“Our study provides evidence that to combat obesity, the U.S. needs to have policies that not only endorse design guidelines for sidewalks, but also for separate and comfortable places to bicycle, such as cycle tracks between sidewalks and parked cars,” said

When promoting physical activity to their patients, the authors encourage physicians to prescribe brisk walking, rather than just walking, but also bicycling. “Bicycling may be more comfortable than brisk walking, especially for overweight women,” said Anne Lusk, research fellow in the HSPH Department of Nutrition.

