

On your bike?

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A James Cook University researcher says a lack of suitable roads is a big reason why cycling participation rates in Australia and Queensland are so low.

JCU lecturer Jemma King said recent estimates suggest that only 34% of

Australian adults have cycled in the previous year and 16% in the previous week.

Ms King said a survey of more than 1200 people in Queensland found two thirds of respondents did not cycle at all.

"The majority of non-cyclists reported it was because of ill-health, age or lack of fitness, a lack of interest or enjoyment in riding a bicycle, or safety concerns. Among those who own a bike the reason most commonly given for not using it was a lack of time or opportunity," she said.

Ms King said [rural people](#) in Australia differ to [urban residents](#) in their reasons for not biking.

"Rural residents were more likely to cite [environmental concerns](#) and preference for other modes of transport or exercise as reasons they had not cycled. Environmental reasons include such things as unsealed shoulders on rural roads, high speed limits and just the sheer distances involved in rural travel."

Ms King said only a small percentage of cyclists seem to be getting the known protective health benefits of cycling 3.5 hours per week.

"Environmental factors appear to be inhibiting cycling participation in rural areas. Government funding for [infrastructure development](#) that supports safe cycling across Queensland including outside of metropolitan areas is something that should be looked at," she said.

Ms King said ideally, this would be in the form of infrastructure that would enable separation of cyclists from motorised vehicles.

Key findings:

- Cyclists in the sample were predominately male (61.3%), employed full time (53%) and had high levels of education (52.6%).
- Concerns for safety (14.3%) and environmental concerns including a terrain or lack of suitable 'bicycle friendly' areas to ride (9.1%) were two other reasons that non-cyclists indicated as influencing their decision not to ride.
- For more than half of cyclists, the usual cycling duration was over 30 minutes.
- Compared with those cycling for less than 30 minutes, cyclists who cycled for over 30 minutes more frequently reported excellent health, cycled as part of a sport, had 15 or more years education, and lived in urban Queensland.
- Only 7.6% of cyclists reported cycling more than 182 hours per year.
- Non-cyclists were typically 55 years of age or older, had no other reported physical activity, had strong religious beliefs and a body mass index above a healthy range.
- Cyclists were typically male, engaged in [physical activity](#), believed bicycle injuries were preventable and self-reported 'not good' mental health at least one day in the past month.

More information: Jemma C. King et al, Exploring Australian residents cycling engagement – Differences in self-reported cycling behaviour between urban and rural dwelling Queenslanders, *Health Promotion Journal of Australia* (2019). [DOI: 10.1002/hpja.254](https://doi.org/10.1002/hpja.254)

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