

Breaking the Myths!

With Dr Arvind Kasthuri, Head of the Department, Community Health
St. John's Medical College, Bangalore

We had the distinct pleasure of interviewing Dr. Kasthuri at his office in St. Johns Medical College. Here are some excerpts of our talk as he breaks one cycling myth after another, as evidenced by father and son cycling to work and school!

Myth 1: Cycling is not possible on Bangalore roads

I am quite happy doing it. Yes, Bangalore traffic is heavy, but cycling is not impossible provided distances are not too great, and you choose a good time of day. Cycling 6.5 -7 km to work

takes about 20 - 25 minutes, which is roughly the same time it takes by car. In fact, in the evenings, when traffic is at its peak, this journey would take longer by car.



Dr. Arvind Kasthuri and his son.

I am committed to using a cycle, and strongly believe that cycling is possible in Bangalore. There are lots of biking groups that have been formed here in Bangalore, like at the Decathlon sports store, promoting cycling and running. I haven't got there yet, but I am aware that groups exist and will someday definitely pursue this. Right now, I cycle for transportation and exercise. But I have a friend who did big things, joined a group, did 80 km to 100 km by bicycle each day on a trek. One day I hope that my son and I will do something like that...

Myth 2: It is not safe for children to cycle to school

My son cycles to school. I was scared to send him alone; initially I accompanied him to school. There are problems, yes, there are roads that are unsafe but I think that it's more a question of timing. You have to find the time that will be good for your child to go on the road. Bangalore traffic police changed the timing schools begin. The objective was to decongest the road, but the side effect of that is that children need to leave early, and at 7:30 in the morning it's reasonably safe for the children to cycle to school. My son is not the only one to use a cycle, there are lots of children who come to school by cycle. If you find the right time for the child to use the road, teach him some basic principles of defensive and safe riding, he will be safe.



Dr. Arvind Kasthuri on his bike.

Myth 3: You can cycle for pleasure, but not to work

What about your clothes? Will you reach office all sweaty and stuff? Questions like this come up...Well, I leave home early and reach the workplace before the crowds arrive. I sit under the fan for 5 or 10 minutes, cool off, wash my face and change from a T- shirt to a shirt, and that's it, I'm ready to start work! These are many stumbling blocks that people put in front of them to say that cycling is not possible, and I am

trying to bust every one of them. When I cycle back home in the months of March, April and maybe May, it's pretty hot, but I am going back home! At home, I do the same: sit under the fan, wash and have a nice cup of coffee with my wife and it's wonderful. Cycling is possible and should happen in a city like Bangalore.

Myth 4: Cyclists are not respected in traffic

Surprisingly, behavior of traffic to the cyclist is not that bad. By and large people look indulgently at you, give way, and they don't hassle you; cars don't push you to the side. My experience is not bad, at least not here in Bangalore!

Myth 5: Gender is a barrier to cycling

The general move we see towards increasing levels of physical activity by men and women, and the number of people out walking and jogging in the mornings suggest that more women are being active outside of their homes. True, we don't see as many women cyclists as we see men, but that will gradually change, I guess.

Why did you start cycling?

Firstly, I am personally concerned about physical activity. I have tried to build in physical activity to my day, ideally about 30 minutes a day of something, anything. I've tried swimming and running, but I found that by cycling to work, I build in 20 - 40 minutes of physical activity without having to search for it; I do it as a part of my daily life. This is a strong driver.

Second thing is about environment; I am not an activist kind of person, but I like to do my bit. From 2002- 2010 I used an electric car. Now, I use my bicycle.

And also, I very strongly believe in the concept of role modeling. I am in a position where I have my students at St John's and my children at home watching. If my student sees me cycling, I hope he is able to ask, "My professor is going



Good bike maintenance is important!

to work by cycle, why can't I?" This is a question that should arise in a young person's mind. I waste no opportunity in publicizing my use of a bicycle to work, and most people to whom I talk to are interested. They ask questions like, is the traffic bad, how long does it take?

The way I look at it is, if I can motivate even one other person to take it up, I will be a happy man!

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