
REVIEW

Health and Wellbeing Benefits of Cycling for Disabled People

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Cycling had never felt possible for me as a disabled person navigating London's often inaccessible transport system. However, discovering inclusive cycling through Wheels for Wellbeing transformed both my mobility and wellbeing, giving me a renewed sense of agency. By sharing my experience, I hope more disabled people will recognise cycling as something that is for them too.

Keywords: inclusive cycling; disability; active travel; wellbeing

When I moved to London in September 2023, I was full of excitement and keen to explore every nook and cranny of this city. But that excitement quickly faded under the weight of the day-to-day mobility challenges. As a disabled person with lower limb impairments who uses crutches, navigating the public transportation system was often difficult and exhausting.

In this city, only 92 of the 272 underground stations are step-free, and even when a station is technically accessible, a broken lift or confusing signage can turn a simple journey into a stressful one. When I decided to make shorter journeys on buses, I experienced everything from drivers who did not wait long enough for me to board at each stop, to buses driving away before I actually sat down.

There's also the psychological toll of having to constantly plan, adapt and problem-solve for journeys that should be straightforward. It can leave you feeling isolated and excluded.

Cycling was never something I felt I could do. It felt reserved for nondisabled people. I did not see anyone like me cycling.

Everything changed in August 2024 when I attended an inclusive cycling session at Herne Hill Velodrome run by Wheels for Wellbeing, an organisation dedicated to make cycling possible for everyone. I had only recently recovered from foot surgery, so I was extremely nervous to try it out. I kept thinking, would I hurt myself? Would I be too slow?

The moment I arrived, those worries began to ease. The atmosphere was warm and supportive. I was introduced to a range of cycles suited to different access needs, including hand-cycles, tricycles, recumbent cycles, and even e-bikes fitted with supportive seating.

The first time I got on a handcycle, it felt awkward, but with a trainer riding side-by-side with me, I slowly gained confidence. I did not feel disabled. I did not feel limited. I simply felt like a cyclist.

Physically, I noticed immediate benefits. The gentle movement improved circulation in my foot and supported my physiotherapy. I also felt good mentally and emotionally.

Cycling at the velodrome quickly became an activity I looked forward to every other week. A few months later, I was able to loan a cycle through Wheels for Wellbeing's Wheels4Me scheme. This gave me the freedom to cycle independently in my community and allowed me to bring active travel into my everyday life, without the anxieties that sometimes come with using buses.

After sharing a story about my experience with BBC London earlier this year, disabled people from across the United Kingdom have reached out asking how they can try cycling too. Knowing that others can access the health and wellbeing benefits that cycling has given me is something that makes me feel really happy.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

How to cite this article: Ahante, PE-O. 2026. Health and Wellbeing Benefits of Cycling for Disabled People. *Active Travel Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 5(2): 1–2. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16997/ats.1915>

Submitted: 09 June 2025

Accepted: 19 February 2026

Published: 22 April 2026

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