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Description

A medical study in 2008 reveals that if a patient suffering with Parkinson's Disease rides on a tandem bicycle, it may help improve his or her motor functions.

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Citation

MLA
Transcript

Treating Parkinson’s Disease with a Tandem Bike
BRIAN WILLIAMS, anchor (St. Paul, Minnesota):
We're back tonight with WHAT WORKS. Sometimes medical research, as you may know, can find help in the most unexpected places. And we have the story of one such example showing real promise when it comes to helping alleviate the awful symptoms of Parkinson's, a nerve disorder that afflicts some six million Americans. As our own Savannah Guthrie reports, this help comes on two wheels.
SAVANNAH GUTHRIE reporting:
The great idea came by accident on a long bike ride across Iowa. Dr. Jay Alberts shared a tandem bike with a friend who had Parkinson's disease and noticed her tremors seemed to disappear.
Dr. JAY ALBERTS: Then I thought, wow, we need to start following this up with some more systemic studies. Something must be going on here with respect to forced exercise.
GUTHRIE: So Alberts launched a small pilot study in his lab at the Cleveland Clinic. Patients rode 40 minutes on a tandem three times a week for eight weeks, and the results were striking. Motor function improved by 35 percent, and most of that improvement remained, even two weeks after the exercise stopped.
Dr. ALBERTS: These results are very encouraging in the sense that they suggest that there may be some long-term effects here, and we may actually be changing brain function.
GUTHRIE: The key is getting the patient to pedal quickly enough, 80 to 90 revolutions per minute, a brisk pace most with Parkinson's cannot achieve by themselves, which is where the tandem comes in. The improvements in motor function, measured with this special gadget, are readily apparent on a computer graph and to the patient himself.
Mr. BRAD HOOVER: I can also walk backwards, I can crisscross, do all kinds of different things. GUTHRIE: Brad Hoover was diagnosed with Parkinson's six years ago and has seen ordinary tasks become increasingly difficult. He's so convinced of the bicycle's effects he's been riding it home.
You do this for almost an hour a day?
Mr. HOOVER: Yes.
GUTHRIE: Science has proven that the tandem can alleviate Parkinson's symptoms; it has yet to show solo cycling can do the same. But Hoover believes he sees a difference.
Mr. HOOVER: To find something that's so simple and gives me the results is phenomenal.
GUTHRIE: Now the study is being expanded to discover why tandem cycling works, with the hope that some day healing might come not just from a bottle, but on a bicycle built for two.
Unidentified Man: How you doing, Brad?
Mr. HOOVER: Doing good.
GUTHRIE: Savannah Guthrie, NBC News, Cleveland.