

What's spinning? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I've been reading about spinning classes in a lot of health magazines. What are they?

Answer

Dear Reader,

The activity you mention — Spinning® — is actually a registered trademark that refers to stationary, indoor cycling. Created by Jonathan Goldberg (also known as Johnny G.), these classes have sprung up all over the world. Although gyms are calling these classes by various other names, most offer similar high intensity workouts that use different cycling techniques and resistance to increase heart rate and muscle engagement. Before jumping (or cycling) in, it's good to be prepared for the first class. Read on for some tips and tricks for starting a cycling journey!

Most cycling classes are about 45 to 60 minutes long. The bikes are specially designed stationary bikes that allow the participant to control their own resistance, which impacts the level of difficulty. Some instructors take the participants on an imaginary ride, describing changing scenery, such as mountains or flat roads, which are usually associated with the amount of resistance they recommend. Other instructors encourage the class through various cycling techniques such as being seated or standing while pedaling. Instructors may use a combination of these strategies to increase and decrease your heartrate throughout the class to maximize fitness and keep you motivated. These classes can certainly be challenging, but it's good to keep in mind that you have some control over the level of difficulty. If you're considering participation and are new to this type of activity or have any injuries, it's wise to let your instructor know before the class starts. That way they can help you adapt the movement in a way that improves your fitness while prioritizing safety.

When participating in a cycling class, it's helpful to have comfortable attire and appropriate shoes. It might be more comfortable to wear biker shorts or some sort of tights as there may be plenty of standing up and sitting down during class. Many bikes require special shoes that clip into the pedals, so it will be good to check in with the gym to see if they offer shoe rentals. If they don't, it's wise to ask if it's okay to wear sneakers instead. If you've decided to try it out, here are

some additional recommendations to help you in your first cycling class:

- Check with the facility in advance to see if they have any height or weight requirements for their bikes. Different brands of bike can be different sizes, so it can help increase safety to ensure you'll be able to properly fit on the bike.
- Arrive early for your first class so you can get help setting up your bike. Having the appropriate seat height, seat position, and handlebar height can help minimize injuries.
- Ask the instructor to review proper form. There are often different positions the instructor will call out throughout the class so it's good to understand the terminology and the correct form for each position.
- Bring a full bottle of water and towel with you. Because this is a higher intensity activity, you might find that you will sweat a lot, so it's key to stay hydrated!
- Go at your own pace —try not to "compete" with others. It's also recommended that you do what's manageable for you so you can follow proper technique and minimize the risk of injury.
- If you're pedaling faster than you want to, you can increase the resistance to help you slow down without hurting yourself.
- Have fun and enjoy but listen to your body. Overuse training injuries can occur with this exercise, as with any other form of physical activity.

It's great that you're asking about different kinds of physical activity — knowing more about various options can help you to find an option that may be most enjoyable for you. For more information on other ways to be physically active, check out the [Go Ask Alice! Nutrition and Physical Activity](#) [2] archives.

Happy cycling!

Alice!

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Published date:

Sep 29, 2000

Last reviewed on:

Sep 04, 2020

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