

# I do not wear Spandex



**Dayle Laing**  
Columnist

You may have considered adding a bicycle to your life and hesitated. Not sure if you could exist without relying on your car. Not sure if you have to squeeze into spandex. Not sure if you could ever find your way on the winding paths or on roads with those drivers. Not sure if you would be comfortable or safe. Not sure if you have to spend big dollars.

I am an analytical middle-aged woman and have never considered myself a cyclist. For most of my adult life, my bike has sat at the back of the garage. The seat was uncomfortable and the drop handlebars caused numbness in my arms. If the gears operated smoothly in the beginning, they had seized long ago. The tires had flattened and thoughts

of riding vanished as the dust built year by year.

Nine years ago, I volunteered to help my nephew run his mountain bike races. He sold me a 'comfort bike' from the bike shop where he worked, and my

dusty bike was donated to a shipment destined for Africa.

I started tentatively, trying the paths near my home in Brampton. Trips to the bank, to the store for a few groceries, even an occasional ice cream treat worked their way into my routine. My trip distances went from 2km to 5km and my confidence grew.

My partner David Laing— along with a group

of like-minded residents— started BikeBrampton, a volunteer advocacy group. The group met in our home initially and I started to take notes as he chaired the meeting. Gradually I was becoming informed on cy-

cling issues as I researched facts to write the meeting minutes.

I ventured out on roads. When I signalled definitively and made eye contact with drivers, they were usually polite and mutual respect developed. I attached a tiny rear-view mirror to the arm of my glasses so I could see the cars coming from behind. Shoulder checks assured me when I could change lanes and turn

corners. My partner pointed out it was better to pass parked cars in a smooth way than to dart in and out, even while signalling. This is more predictable to drivers, and something I could appreciate as a driver myself. A lightweight mesh reflective vest for road travel made it easier to see me from a distance. It adjusted

according to Beth Savan, Ph.D. University of Toronto. Women take fewer risks, enhancing their safety. Do I have to be more visible during the day when I cycle? No, but I feel safer, especially since there are no separated bike lanes where I live. I am analytical, so I like to increase my odds.

A 15km round trip to

down and I needed to buy a new lighter weight bike without spending a fortune.

This evolution feels sudden, yet it has really occurred over the last four years. The progress has snuck into my life so that I have been hardly aware of the change. I am able to cycle more than 60km. My blood pressure, already normal, is now low-normal. Lung capacity feels comfortable and I feel my overall cardio health has improved. In some ways, I am in better shape than when I was 20.

Today, I look for opportunities to take my bike instead of jumping into the car, as I save money on gas and on parking. I wear what is right for the occasion, since I am not racing. I never forget that I am sharing the road with other vehicles, as is my right under the Highway Traffic Act. When a very few drivers honk and tell me I don't belong on the road, I smile and wave. I am reducing my carbon footprint and treading more lightly on the earth.

## “Women are at no greater risk on their bikes than they are walking”

over business suits, T-shirts or parkas. The Ontario Highway Traffic Act was amended in 2015, allowing me to turn on my rear light to flashing red, even in the daylight. Motorists have to give me at least a metre when they pass me on the road.

Research supports how I feel about cycling on the road. “Women are at no greater risk on their bikes than they are walking,”

downtown Brampton became possible. Amazingly, I cycled more than 30km to the south end of Brampton for a meeting. I arrived glowing, but not sweating. My suit jacket was fine. It was not necessary to wear spandex. My helmet did not mess up my hair too much.

My comfort bike's gears wore out and could no longer be tuned at the local bike repair shop. My heavy steel bike was slowing me



How you arrive to a meeting is not what defines you as a professional. Dayle cycles to Peel Region for meetings, and depending on distance and time, will travel to interior design consultations on bike too.

Courtesy **Dayle Laing**

Get your *Peel Daily News Digital* **EVERY DAY** subscribe at [www.PeelDailyNews.com](http://www.PeelDailyNews.com)