

Riding the Long Road to Health and Happiness

By Regan Arendse, FRCP, PhD

My priorities and perspective on life changed quite dramatically in the months leading up to my 50th birthday. Not only was this landmark date somewhat daunting, but the sudden cardiac death of a close friend at a similar age made me take a closer look at where I was headed in life as a busy community rheumatologist. I realized that unless I made some substantial changes in my lifestyle, I would significantly reduce my chances of maintaining good health in the final few decades of my life.

With the encouragement of my wife Germaine, I started with the one physical activity that I often advocated for my patients: riding a bicycle to enjoy a cardio session without stress on the knees. So, after purchasing a second-hand bike at my local bike store, I joined a local cycling club that taught me all the basics of riding safely and responsibly on the road with traffic, in a group with similarly aged and intentioned riders. Germaine joined the club a year later, and we both eventually graduated from struggling to complete 30 km rides to being able to comfortably ride 100 km in a day.

A year later, our cycling club then introduced us to a unique discipline of bike riding called randonneuring, which involves progressively increasing the distance we ride in an event from 200 km to the unbelievable distance of 1,200 km. Over the three-year COVID-19 pandemic period, we extended our riding range and, in the year 2022, completed a series of rides that included distances of 200 km, 300 km, 400 km, 600 km, 1,000 km, and eventually 1,200 km, each within the prescribed time limit. Each distance we attempted was a challenge, from learning how to use our cycling equipment for these extended distances, to how to mentally overcome our fears and insecurities of riding for such long periods and, finally, to training our bodies, especially the tender contact points, to withstand the demands of the required physical exertion.

Our aim in 2023 is to participate in the most prestigious randonneur event of all called the Paris-Brest-Paris (PBP). This event covers a distance of 1,200 km from the City of Paris to the west coast of France and an elevation



Drs. Regan and Germaine Arendse

gain of 11,000 m in the hills of the Province of Brittany. We, along with an 8,000-strong field of cyclists from around the world, will try to complete this randonneuring challenge within the time limit of 90 hours.

We intend to document our preparation for this ride and our participation in the PBP by producing YouTube videos to help and inspire others who intend to make a significant change in their lives. We believe that if we can successfully transform from couch potatoes to endurance athletes in just five years, then anyone can. Have a look at some of the popular videos we have posted on YouTube that provide step-by-step advice on how to start and succeed at randonneuring. Our YouTube site is available at www.youtube.com/@reganarendse6157.

Please keep your fingers crossed for a safe and successful year for all of the long-distance cyclists participating in various randonneur events around the world this year.

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