

Never Cycle Without a Helmet (& Other Tips for Safer Biking)



Wearing a helmet is the single most important thing you can do to prevent serious injury from bicycle accidents. Other injury-preventive measures include wearing gloves, choosing the right size bike, and riding on well-maintained roads. But wearing a helmet is still critical. Not just any helmet will do, however. Look for the following features.

- Outer layer or shell that is bright yellow, white, orange, or red (so motorists can see you more easily), and is constructed of hard plastic or polycarbonate.
- Waterproof finish.
- Stiff polystyrene lining.
- Securely attached nylon strap and fastener.
- A label signifying that the American Standards Institute or the Snell Memorial Foundation has certified the helmet as safe.

Whatever your cycling style, don't sacrifice safety for thrills. To be sure your equipment is safe and reliable:

- Choose a bike that's right for your size. When seated, you should be able to put one foot on the ground without leaning the bike to one side or the other.
- Brakes should be in good working order—that is, enabling you to stop within 15 feet while riding at 10 miles per hour.
- Check tires for worn spots, punctures, or other signs of wear. Fix or repair, as needed.

- By law, all bicycles must have red reflectors, visible for 500 feet, on the sides, rear, and pedals.
- The bicycle should have headlights.
- Rearview mirrors are optional, but helpful.

Additional tips:

- Obey all traffic laws, just as you would if you were driving a car. (Ride with traffic, not against it; observe traffic signs and signals; stay to the right; maintain a safe following distance between you and the vehicle ahead of you; and use hand signals for turning.)
- Look behind you before turning or changing lanes.
- Consider walking your bike across intersections not governed by traffic signals, especially if traffic is heavy.
- Whenever possible, choose routes over smooth pavement.
- Drive defensively, anticipating the actions of motorists, pedestrians, and other bikers.
- Keep your eyes on the road. Watch for potholes, parked cars, and children or animals entering your path.
- Pay attention. Don't listen to a portable radio or tape player while riding.
- Don't B.W.I.—bike while intoxicated. It's just as risky as driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

The above rules apply whether you're biking for exercise, sport, or transportation.