Cycling—Getting Started

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Cycling can be an excellent form of exercise, recreation, and transportation. If you are getting started in this sport, there are some basic issues that you should consider.

Choosing the Bike
There are two primary types of bicycling: on-road and off-road. One of the most notable differences between bikes built for these types of riding is the width of the tires. Bikes built for on-road cycling have narrow tires with shallow treads, whereas off-road bikes have wider tires with deeper treads. The choice of a bike should be made based on the type of cycling you plan to do.

Several considerations are important when choosing the type of biking to pursue. What is the goal of your cycling? What types of riding are most convenient in your area? Are you going to be using your bike for transportation? What best fits your personality, skill, and budget? Before buying a bike, it is good to get to know some other cyclists in your area to find out about local safe places to ride and arrange to try out some different bikes for yourself. Many cycling shops will allow potential buyers to go out for a trial run. When buying a bicycle, it also is important to purchase a bike that fits your size. Sales people in a good bike shop can be very helpful in choosing a bike with the features you need to get started. It is good to purchase a bike with the standard features that you need for safety and an enjoyable experience. Once it is clear that cycling is the sport for you, then you can begin the process of upgrading and adding special features.

Wear a Helmet!
Your most important safety precaution is wearing a helmet. Head injuries can occur even at slow speeds, and it is critical that the head be protected in the event of a fall. The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) tests bicycle helmets, so make sure that the helmet you purchase has a CPSC sticker of approval.

A properly fitting helmet should be level and snug and not move around when you shake your head. It is important in the event of a fall that the helmet remains in place. Chin straps must always be secured when riding. Helmets commonly come with either a fitting ring or fitting pads to adjust the helmet size. When adjusted properly, the helmet should make contact comfortably all around. In other words, there should be no spaces or pressure points. Use the expertise of individuals at bicycling shops to help fit your helmet correctly. For more information about biking helmets, see the Bicycle Helmet Safety Institute’s Web site (www.helmets.org).

Planning for Weather Conditions
Cycling is best when the wind is light, the sun is shining, and the temperature is moderate. Here are tips for working around unfavorable weather conditions. First, keep an eye on changing weather conditions. Get an up-to-date weather forecast before heading out. Second, get home before dark. Know your bike route and plan carefully to get home while the sun is still up. Third, remember that layered clothing allows you to add or subtract layers as the changing temperature requires. Fourth, know when to say “No.” Wet surfaces and low visibility greatly increase the risk of a crash. You may want to consider purchasing a “trainer” that you can attach your bike to when the weather conditions are unfavorable. This will allow you to get in a good (although maybe more boring) workout even when cycling outside is dangerous.

Cycling can be a great sport for enjoyment and for health. For more information on cycling, visit the Web site of the League of American Bicyclists (www.bikeleague.org).

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