

5 smart ways to Enjoy Safe Bike Rides

Biking is a fun and very healthy way to get to school, work or somewhere scenic. Wherever you bike, safety should always come first. Here are five very important things to check before you take a bike on a street or trail. Some need to be checked once a season. Others are important every time you get on a bike.

1. Check the ABCs - air, brakes and chain.

Bikes need a complete tune-up at least once a year. This is important to make sure a bike is road (or trail) worthy. You can take your bike to a reliable bike shop. Or you can learn to do-it-yourself at a bike clinic. Before you head out on a ride, a quick check of air, brakes and chain never hurts. This is especially true if you have an older bike or when you ride on dirty surfaces. Check to see that the tires are inflated, the brakes are clean and the chain is free of debris and turning freely.

2. Check the seat height.

When a bike seat is at the wrong height for your body, it can be uncomfortable and dangerous. How do you know if the seat is the right height? Sit on the bike while standing still. Make certain that only the tips of your toes touch the ground on both sides of the bike. At the same time, check to see that the handlebars are also at a comfortable height for you.

3. Check helmet fit.

Wearing a helmet on a bike is just as important as wearing a seat belt in the car. In North Carolina, it is the law that anyone under 16 years must wear a helmet while biking. Unfortunately, many people wear helmets that do not fit well. A helmet that does not fit cannot protect your head in an accident. There are many ways to figure out if you have a proper fit. Go to a bike shop or bike safety clinic. Or read directions online: www.nhtsa.gov/people/injury/pedbimot/bike/easystepsweb.

4. Check shoes and clothing.

Biking in flip-flops, high heels, or soft, dressy shoes is never a smart idea. Wear flat-soled shoes that fit snugly. Avoid shoes with dangling pieces that could get caught in the chain or spokes. Use elastics or ties to hold back long pants or skirts. Bike lights and reflective clothing or backpacks are important accessories. These are especially important when the light is low.

5. Check traffic continuously.

If you go biking, you must know the rules of the road. There are rules for cyclists and for drivers. You should know both. It is important to use common sense when riding on any street or trail. Be sure to always watch what other two- and four-wheeled vehicles are doing. Many communities have bike rodeos, classes or clinics to help children learn to ride safely.

