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How to Not Get Hit on a Bicycle

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With millions of cyclists on the roads-the same roads occupied by millions of motor vehicles that are larger, heavier and faster than bicycles-defensive driving applies to both cyclists and drivers. By obeying traffic laws, we not only avoid collisions with automobiles, but we also avoid crashing into each other.

Despite what some may think, there is no special exemption to the law for cyclists. In fact, many accidents occur because a cyclist failed to stop at a stop sign, did not signal at an intersection or ran through a red traffic light. Just as cyclists expect motorists to abide by traffic laws, they, too, expect you to follow them.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 500,000 people in the United States are treated in emergency rooms and more than 700 people die as a result of bicycle-related injuries every year.

Taking precautions in traffic, maintaining your bicycle properly and wearing protective equipment are clearly a cyclist's best defense against unintentional injuries. The following suggestions are offered to help make cycling fun and safe.

Pre-ride Checklist

Before you start out on the road or dirt trail, it's important to be prepared. Like many other skills, riding skills are perishable. Your riding skills may not be as sharp in May as they were in November when you last rode your bicycle. And don't forget to consider the

roadworthiness of your bicycle. Just because it was OK when you put it up last fall doesn't mean it is road ready now.

A quick check of your bicycle before riding can help prevent those long walks home. It only takes about two minutes. Make it a habit and your chances of a breakdown are greatly reduced.

- **Check the quick-release levers.** Make sure your quick-release levers are installed correctly on your wheels and are properly tightened. A runaway wheel is a nasty surprise.
- **Bounce the bicycle.** Pick up your bike 4 or 5 inches off the ground and bounce it once or twice. Listen for unusual rattles; they can indicate loose parts about to fall off.
- **Check the brakes.** Check the front and rear brakes separately. Give the levers a good squeeze to make sure they are tight and the cable is fastened securely.
- **Spin the wheels.** Lift the front of the bicycle off the ground an inch or so and spin the front wheel. It should spin freely with no brake rub and should be relatively true. Listen for grinding sounds in the hub that indicate the need for maintenance. Do the same for the rear wheel.
- **Check the cranks.** Make sure the crank bolts are tight and the chain rings are true and are not missing any teeth.
- **Check the headset.** Hold the front brake down and gently rock the bicycle forward and back. A loose or worn bearing will make a distinct click. Tighten or service if necessary.
- **Check the tires.** Make sure your tires have the correct amount of air pressure and examine them for rips, tears or sharp objects stuck into the tread. Check brake and derailleur cables for fraying.
- **Check the handlebars.** Make sure the handlebars and stem are fastened securely. Visually examine the handlebars for bends or cracks. If you find any, replace immediately.

Tips for Safe Biking

- **Wear a helmet**. Head injuries cause about 75 percent of all bicycling fatalities. The first body part to fly forward in a collision is usually the head, and with nothing but

skin and bone to protect the brain from injury, the results can be tragic. Look for helmets with Snell Memorial Foundation or American National Standards Institute approval stickers.

- **Obey traffic rules**. Cyclists must follow the same rules as motorists. Ride in single file with traffic, not against it. Bicycling two abreast can be dangerous. Cyclists should stay as far right on the pavement as possible, watching for opening car doors, sewer gratings, soft shoulders, broken glass and other debris. Remember to keep a safe distance from the vehicle ahead.

Adult cyclists should never ride on sidewalks. Crossing between sidewalks is a dangerous maneuver. Drivers aren't expecting bicycles in the crosswalk, and it's hard for them to see you because of the nature of turning from one street to another. Sidewalk riding also makes you vulnerable to cars pulling out of parking lots or driveways. And you're threatening to pedestrians on the sidewalk, who could get hurt if you hit them. Children should ride on the sidewalk instead of the roadway. They should be cautious and courteous of others along the route to avoid mishaps.

- **Stay alert**. Always look in all directions before riding into traffic. Some motorists like to pass cyclists within mere inches, so moving even a tiny bit to the left unexpectedly could put you in the path of a car. Cyclists should always use turn signals. You're less likely to get hit when your movement doesn't take motorists by surprise. Let them know you're about to turn, or move left or right by signaling with your arm. Point your left arm out to move left, and point your right arm out to move right (preferred) or use the automotive practice of extending your left arm and angle your forearm vertically upward.
- **Always be seen**. Wear a reflective vest or a safety triangle. High-quality reflective gear makes you a lot more visible even in the daytime, not just at night. During the day, cyclists should wear bright clothing. Use a front headlight. Even for daytime riding, a bright white headlight that has a flashing mode can make you more visible to motorists. Cyclists also should get a flashing red rear light. If you ride at night, get a rear light. Bicycle shops have red rear blinkers for $15 or less that typically take two AA batteries, which last for months.
- **Make sure your bicycle has the right safety equipment**. Your bicycle should have a red rear reflector, white front reflector, red or colorless spoke reflector on the rear

wheel, amber or colorless reflector on the front wheel and pedal reflectors. Although a mirror is not mandatory for riding bikes, it helps you monitor traffic without constantly having to look behind you. If you don't have one, you can get one from a bicycle shop. There are models that fit on your handlebars, helmets or glasses, as you prefer. A horn or bell is also useful to warn motorists they're coming too close to you.

Remember, bicycle riding is an activity that's fun for the whole Family. When done correctly, it's also safe. Make sure you follow these rules of the road to not get hit riding a bicycle.

For additional bicycle safety information, visit:
http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/bikeinjuries.html