

Cycling health and safety tips

Cycling is a great form of exercise and it's fun. There are lots of health benefits associated with regular cycling. Your cardiovascular fitness will improve and this means you'll lower your risk of heart attack and stroke. Pedalling is low impact, so you can improve muscle tone without stressing your knee and ankle joints.

Cycling is also a practical mode of transport. You could ride to work and not only reap the health benefits, but also save on petrol costs, public transport tickets and parking fees.

You might prefer to cycle for pleasure, by yourself or with family or friends, along some of Victoria's thousands of kilometres of bike paths. You could even take a bike-riding holiday.

The health and safety tips below will help you get the most out of your cycling and reduce your risk of injury.

The bicycle

Suggestions include:

- Make sure your bicycle is appropriate for your height and needs. Ask staff at bike shops for help when choosing a new bicycle.
- Have your bicycle professionally serviced once every year.
- Regularly check your bike yourself, perhaps once a week, to make sure it is in good repair. Check the tyres, bearings, gears, nuts and bolts, and lubricate the chain and cables. If you're not sure how to do this, consult with staff at your local bike shop.
- Adjust your saddle for your leg length. Your knee should be only slightly bent when your foot is on the pedal with your leg fully extended. You risk knee strain if your knees are too bent.
- Your handlebars should be positioned about five centimetres lower than your saddle height.
- Narrow seats may be uncomfortable, particularly for women. Opt for a wider saddle or a gel-filled saddle.

The helmet

Suggestions include:

- Always wear a helmet. Wearing a helmet is compulsory by law. You could be fined if you are caught riding your bike without a helmet.
- Research suggests that wearing a helmet reduces the risk of head injury by up to 60 per cent.
- Make sure your helmet is Australian Approved and fits your head correctly.
- If your helmet hits the road or an object, replace it, even if it still looks okay.
- Look after your helmet. Keep it out of direct sunlight when not in use, and clean it strictly according to the manufacturer's instructions.

General health and safety suggestions

Suggestions include:

- Let someone know your intended route and what time you think you'll be back.
- Wear sunscreen on skin not covered by clothing.
- Take a drink with you to reduce the risk of dehydration.

- Pack identification, money and your mobile phone (if you have one) in case of emergencies.
- Don't wear headphones. You need to hear what's going on around you.
- Cycling shorts reduce the risk of skin irritation because the material doesn't bunch and rub against your buttocks.

Road rules

Suggestions include:

- Treat your bicycle as you would your car, and obey the road rules. Don't ride on the wrong side of the road or coast through red lights, for example.
- Flag your intention to turn by hand signalling.
- When turning right, perform a hook turn from the left side of the road.
- Ride in a predictable way, about one metre out from parked cars.
- Cyclists are permitted to ride two abreast, but you should ride in single file in heavy traffic.
- You are permitted to overtake on the left, provided the vehicle you're overtaking isn't turning left.
- When riding on shared paths, or Rail Trails where there are people walking, use your bell to indicate your intention to pass.

Visibility on the roads

Suggestions include:

- Wear brightly coloured clothing. It is harder for motorists to see you if you are dressed in dark or dull colours.
- Fluorescent fabrics markedly increase your visibility to other road users.
- Have lights fitted to your bike, front and back, for night or poor light riding.
- Reflective garments, including reflectors fitted to the back of your shoes, can increase your visibility at night.

Riding tactics

Suggestions include:

- Altering your riding position from time to time reduces the risk of muscle overuse, stiffness and soreness.
- Pedalling in high gear for a long time will stress your knee joints. Switch to lower gears whenever you can.
- Maintain the same cycling rhythm when going uphill by changing gears.
- Once you've crested the hill, avoid the temptation to coast down the other side. Pedal a little bit to reduce the risk of lactic acid build-up in your leg muscles.
- Avoid using your brakes continuously when riding down a long hill, because you may overheat your brakes. Instead, apply the brakes gently and intermittently.
- Don't assume that car drivers have seen you. Make eye contact with car drivers when negotiating turns or intersections.

Riding on the footpath

Generally speaking, people aged 12 years and over are not permitted to cycle on the footpath. However, there are exceptions to this rule, including:

- An adult who is supervising a child under 12 on their bike is allowed to ride on the footpath with them.
- Riding on the road may not be safe for some people with certain physical or intellectual disabilities. Riding on the footpath is allowed, so long as the person has a medical certificate that states their exemption.
- Postal officers who are delivering mail are allowed to cycle on the footpath.
- When riding on the footpath, you must keep to the left whenever possible, and always give way to pedestrians.

Reduce the risk of bicycle theft

In Victoria, about 10,000 bikes are stolen each year. To reduce the chances of theft:

- Use 'U' locks combined with flexible cables to lock up your bicycle.
- Lock the bicycle to an immovable object.
- About half of bicycle thefts occur from households, so make sure you lock up your bicycle when storing it at home.
- Engrave your licence number on the bicycle frame.
- Ask your insurance company about insuring your bicycle against theft.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Bicycle Network Victoria Tel. 1800 639 634,
- Vic Roads Tel. 131 171

Things to remember

- Wearing a helmet reduces the risk of head injury by up to 60 per cent.
- Treat your bicycle as you would your car, and obey the road rules.
- Ensure your visibility by fitting your bicycle with lights for night riding.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Bicycle Network Victoria

Content on this website is provided for education and information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. Content has been prepared for Victorian residents and wider Australian audiences, and was accurate at the time of publication. Readers should note that, over time, currency and completeness of the information may change. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2012 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.