

Pre-ride Safety Check

ABC Quick Check

To insure your bike is in top condition, do this quick check before each ride. Timely bicycle maintenance can prevent crashes.

A is for Air

Check your tire pressure with a gauge — tubes should be inflated to the air pressure noted on the tire sidewall. While checking the pressure, take a moment to look for damage to the sidewalls or tread of the tire. If you can see loose threads showing through the rubber, the tire should be replaced.

B is for Brakes

Put your thumb between lever and the handle bar and squeeze the brake lever. You should not pinch your thumb. When you release the lever it should snap back into position. Visually check the brake pads for wear and the need for adjustment. If there is less than 1/8" of brake pads left at any point, they probably need replacing. Also squeeze the brakes to make certain that the pads are parallel to and aligned with the side of the rim when applied. How to adjust your brakes is found in the section on maintenance.

C is for Cranks, Chain and Cassette

Check to see that the bottom bracket, crank arms and chainrings are tight. To check the crank, take the left and right crank arms in your hands and attempt to move them sideways, away from the bicycle frame. If both move, you may have a loose or worn bottom bracket. If only one moves, the individual crank arm bolt is loose and must be tightened. Never ride with a loose crank arm. Make sure the chain looks like metal, not rust or black gunk. Turn the pedals backwards to see if the chain travels smoothly. Check the cassette to make sure it is clean and moving freely.

Q is for Quick Release

Your bike likely has quick release levers holding the wheels to the bicycle, on the brakes and maybe even on the seat post. Quick releases on the

hubs of your wheels feature a lever on one side and a nut on the other. Check to ensure that the wheels are clamped securely before each ride. To adjust the quick release, first pull the lever open. Make sure the wheel is firmly in place. Hold the quick release lever with one hand while gradually tightening the adjusting nut with the other hand in a clockwise direction. Tighten the nut until you feel resistance on the lever, then use the palm of your hand to close it.

Check

Before you set out, take a brief, slow ride to check that your bicycle is working properly.

If, during your ABC Quick Check, you determine that adjustments are necessary and beyond your ability, enlist the help of a mechanic at your local bike shop.

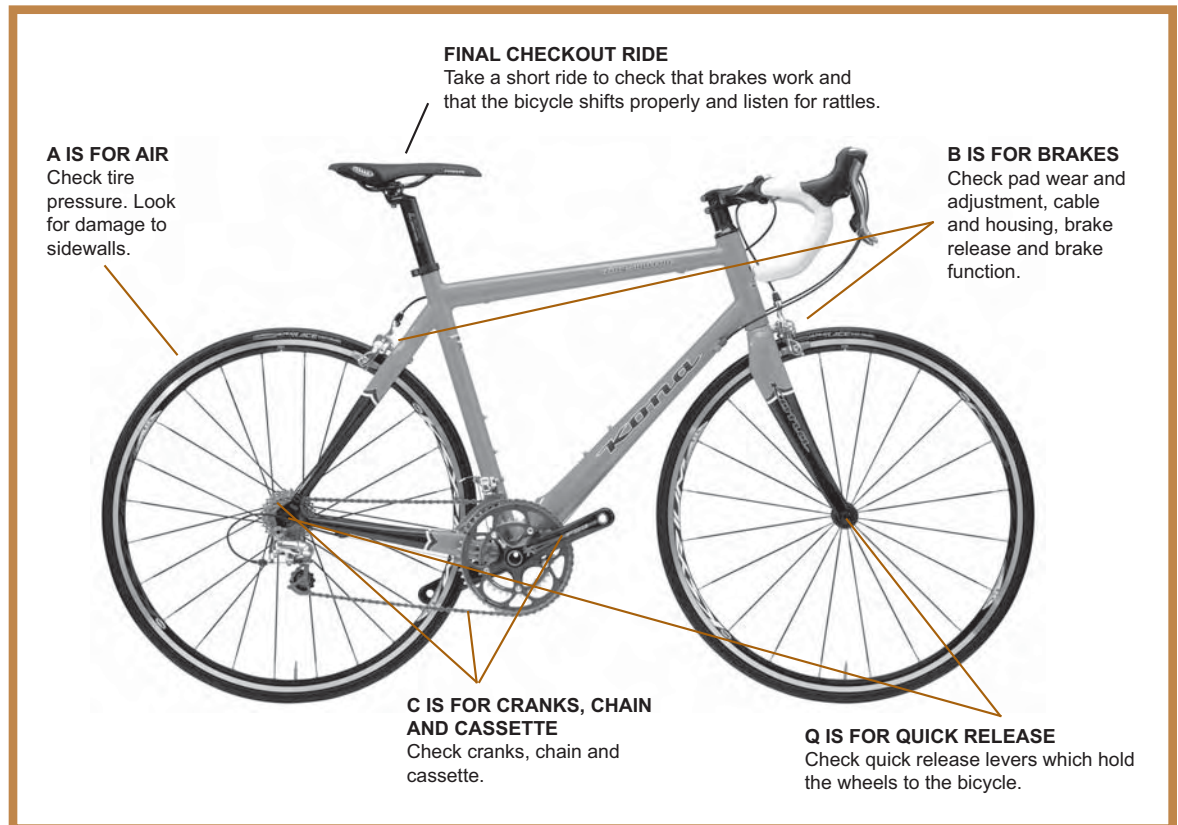


photo courtesy of Kona Bicycle Co.

League Cycling Instructor's Need to Know for adults and teenagers

ALWAYS

Wear a helmet, conduct an ABC Quick Check before every ride, ride on the right and obey traffic control devices, ride predictably and be visible at all times, scan for traffic and signal lane changes and turns, control your bike by practicing bike handling skills, drink before you are thirsty and eat before you are hungry.

Wear a Helmet

A helmet is your last line of defense in a crash, never ride without one. Helmets can reduce serious head injuries by 85% in a crash. Make sure that the helmet fits on top of the head, not tipped back. The straps should be joined just under each ear at the jawbone, the buckle should be snug with your mouth completely open. Periodically check your strap adjustment as improper fit can render helmet useless. After a crash or any impact that affects your helmet, replace it immediately

ABC Quick Check

A is for air

Tires naturally lose air over time; if you don't pump them up, they will go flat; Inflate tires to rated pressure as listed on the sidewall of the tire; know your valves, presta or schraeder; carry an adapter just in case. Use a pressure gauge to insure proper pressure; Floor pumps work best at home. Check for damage to tire tread and sidewall; replace if damaged

B is for brakes

Inspect pads for wear; replace is there is less than ¼" of pad left; Check pad adjustment; make sure they do not rub tire or dive into spokes; Check brake lever travel; at least 1" between bar and lever when applied

C is for cranks, chain and cassette

Make sure that your crank bolts are tight; lube the threads only; Check your chain for wear; 12 links should measure no more than 12 1/8 inches; If your chain skips on your cassette, you might need a new one or just a derailleur adjustment

Quick is for quick releases

Hubs need to be tight in the frame; your quick release should engage at 90°; Your hub quick release should point to the rear of the bike to insure that nothing catches on it; Inspect brake quick releases to insure that they have been re-engaged

Check is for check it over

Take a quick ride to check if derailleurs and brakes are working properly; Inspect the bike for loose or broken parts; tighten, replace or fix them; Pay extra attention to your bike during the first few miles of the ride

Riding Comfort

Maintain your body's water level by drinking often; one water bottle per hour; Consume low-fat snacks such as fruit or energy bars. Eat before you are hungry and drink before you are thirsty to avoid fatigue

Most beginning cyclists push too big a gear; down shift and spin a smaller gear; Try to spin about 90 rpms; you'll have more energy and get a better workout; You should be comfortable

while you ride

Change hand positions often, slightly bend your elbows, stretch your neck while riding; Make sure that your saddle height is adjusted properly; You should have a slight bend in your knee at the bottom of the pedal stroke; too high and your hips rock; too low causes knee pain

Bicycles are part of traffic

Check for oncoming traffic before entering any street or intersection. Ride on the right, with traffic. Use the lane furthest to the right that heads in the direction that you are traveling. Obey all traffic control devices, such as stop signs, traffic lights, and lane markings. Always use hand signals to indicate your intention to stop or turn to motorists and cyclists. Anticipate hazards and adjust position in traffic accordingly. Ride in a straight line, not in and out of parked cars on the side of the road. Always ride far enough away from parked cars to avoid hitting a surprise open door. Ride far enough away from curb or edge of roadway to avoid hazards. Ride in the right third of the right-most lane that goes in the direction you are going. Take the lane if there is insufficient road width for cyclists and cars to share. Take the lane if traveling the same speed as other traffic or if hazards narrow the usable width. Take the lane before intersections and turns to assert your position on the roadway. In all 50 states, the laws require that you ride on the right, with the flow of traffic.

Bike Lanes and Bike Paths

Courtesy

Yield to slower users and especially kids. Obey speed limits; they are posted for your safety

Announce when passing

Use a bell, horn or voice to indicate your intention to pass other users. Warn other in advance so you do not startle them. Clearly announce "On your left" when passing.

Yield when entering and crossing

Slow down before intersections and when entering the trail from the road.

Keep right

Stay as close to the right as possible, except when passing. Give yourself enough room to maneuver around any hazards.

Pass on left

Scan ahead and behind before announcing your intention to pass another user; Allow plenty of room, about two bike lengths, before moving back to the right. Do not pass when visibility is limited ahead.

Be predictable

Travel in a straight line except to avoid hazards or pass. Indicate your intention to turn or pass.

Be visible

Wear brightly colored clothing at all times. Make eye contact with motorists to let them know you are there. Always ride in or near a travel lane. Stay visible by riding where drivers are looking. Do not pass on the right because motorists are not looking for other vehicles there.

At night

By law, you must have a front white light and red rear reflector. A red blinking light is much more conspicuous than a passive reflector. Make sure that your light is visible to motorists and not pointing up or down. Clear obstructions from the back of the bike that would block the light.

Over-10 Need to Know

A bicycle is a vehicle and you're a driver

Did you know that in virtually all states, bicycles are legal vehicles on the street, just like cars? That means that when you ride in the street, you are a bicycle driver. And that means that your bicycle, just as surely as a motorcycle or car, must be operated safely to avoid injury or death. In the street, bicycle drivers must obey all motor-vehicle traffic laws and signaling devices. When drivers of both motorized and non-motorized vehicles follow the same laws on the same streets, then everyone will know what to expect and crashes will be minimized.

Lastly, learning safe bicycling helps give you both the skills and the reflexes you'll need to get your driver's license in your later teens.

Always wear a helmet and make sure it fits!

A helmet protects your precious head and brain. But for a helmet to work, it has to fit snugly. Put on your helmet without buckling it and shake your head. Does the helmet slide around? If so, it's too loose. Try a smaller size. If that is too small, put in the thicker pads. The unbuckled helmet should be snug enough to stay on your head when you tilt your head forward.

Now buckle the strap. Does the strap fit snugly under your chin or does it hang loose? If it's loose, tighten it up. It should fit tight enough that it holds the helmet level over your eyebrows so the helmet cannot be pushed back and expose your forehead.

P.S. Bike gloves act as helmets for your hands; not only do they protect you in a fall, but they also cushion against vibration and road shock.

Do an ABC Hand Check before every ride

Safe equipment is fun equipment. Do this 30-second check each time before you ride.

A is for air

Make sure your bike tires feel firm, not soft. Check that the tire is filled to the air pressure written on the tire's sidewall. Make sure there are also no cuts or splits or bubbles in the tire.

B is for brakes

If you have foot brakes, charge down the driveway and test them to make sure they really stop you. If you have hand brakes, make sure the whole brake pad squeezes tightly on the wheel's metal rim, not on the rubber tire or on empty air. And when you squeeze the brake lever, make sure the lever does not touch the handlebar. If your brakes don't stop you, do not ride the bike until they are fixed.

C is for chain

Make sure your chain is not loose enough to fall off, especially if you have foot brakes. Is the chain dry and rusted? If so, apply a tiny drop of chain lube to each link. Store your bicycle indoors in a clean, dry place.

Hand is for handlebar

Many crashes happen because the handlebars are loose and you can't steer the bike. Grip the front tire between your knees and try to turn the handlebar. The handlebar should not turn without turning the wheel. If the handlebar turns and the wheel doesn't, tighten the bolt on top of the stem.

Check is for checking everything else

Look over the rest of your bike. Do you see any broken spokes, or are they intact? Are all nuts and bolts holding on your wheels and rack nice and tight? If your bike has quick-release wheels, are the quick release handles firmly closed and pointing toward the rear of the bike? Does the saddle wiggle or twist or is it good and tight? Fix anything that bothers you before you ride!

Obey motor-vehicle signs and signals

In the United States, the traffic statutes of many states are based on the federal government's Uniform Vehicle Code. The code states that traffic laws pertain to bicycles and other human-powered vehicles. That means that bicycles have the right to be on the roads. They also have the responsibility to obey traffic laws.

Go with the traffic flow

Always ride your bike with traffic. That is, on the right hand side of the road or bike path. Never drive your bike on the left side of the road, facing oncoming automobile traffic. Motorists do not expect to see oncoming traffic in their own lanes. On one-way streets you cannot see the traffic signs and signals. Worst of all, a head-on collision with a car is very likely to be fatal.

Be predictable

Ride a straight line. Do not swerve around in the street, in and out of moving traffic or parked cars. At the same time, don't cling to the curb. Ride far enough to the left of parked cars to avoid being doored by a driver stepping out.

Ride single file

Don't ride more than two abreast except on bicycle paths or roads set aside for non-motorized traffic. Single file is far safer, unless you're riding on exceptionally traffic-free rural roads. If you're riding with your adults or older teens, let the most experienced cyclist ride in the rear ("sweep") where he/she can keep an eye on everyone else riding ahead.

Carefully choose how to turn left

The Uniform Vehicle Code allows two types of left turns at intersections. If the intersection is very busy or you're below legal driving age, dismount at the corner and walk the bikes across the street at the crosswalk. Remount the bike and head left on the new road when the signal turns green. If the intersection is not busy or you're old enough to drive, merge into the left lane or left-turn lane as a motor vehicle would and turn left at a green arrow or green light after yielding to oncoming traffic.

Signal and scan

When you wish to turn right or left, or to stop, use arm signals standard for motor vehicles. All 50 states recognize arm signals performed with the left arm. The hand pointing straight left indicates a left turn. The hand pointing down indicates a stop. The hand pointing up indicates a right turn.

Yield to traffic

Almost always, drivers on a smaller road must yield, that means wait for, traffic on a bigger road. People are expected to know this even if there is no stop sign or traffic signal. So if your bike path or sidewalk crosses an alley or road and there is no sign or signal, you must stop completely and look too see if the way is clear.

Be visible

Wear light and bright clothing such as bright yellow. Make sure your bicycle has at least one white reflector facing front, a red reflector facing rear, reflectors on the spokes pointing to the sides, and amber reflectors on the pedals. More reflectors are better. Feel free to add additional ones to your clothing, racks or panniers. If you'll be riding at dawn or dusk, get a bright white headlight and red or amber taillight as well.

Watch for road hazards

Do you see a pothole in the road, some broken glass, some gravel, or a pile of leaves? All those things are road hazards that could cause a crash. If you're riding with other cyclists, especially if you're in the lead, yell out "Pothole!" "Glass!" "Gravel!" or "Leaves!" and point down to alert the riders behind you.

Bells and whistles

A bike bell or horn is required by the traffic statutes of many states and is a good idea. Buy the loudest bike bell you can find. However, the Uniform Vehicle Code specifically prohibits cyclists from using a police-style siren or whistle, which could be construed as impersonating an officer.

Don't act stupid

The Uniform Vehicle Code specifically outlaws foolhardy behaviors that put kids at risk. Make sure you and your friends are aware of these safety laws:

No bicycle should carry more people than the number for which it was designed. In other words, don't give friends rides on the handlebars, foot pegs or rear rack.

Don't attach the bike or yourself to any other vehicle on the roadway. In other words, don't try to hitch a ride by holding on to a moving truck or bus. It's an excellent way to get killed.

Keep one hand on the handlebars at all times. Ride with both hands in the street.

Make sure your brakes work. No riding without brakes.

Make sure one ear is clear of headphones. Headphones are unsafe on a bicycle in any case, but if you do like to rock and ride, it is illegal to have earphones cover both ears.

A uniformed police officer may require the cyclist to stop and allow the bike to be inspected.

Note to Adult

Emphasize to your child that a bicycle is not a toy; it's the child's first vehicle. Yes, people ride bikes to have fun, but all these vehicles, including bicycles, must be operated safely to avoid crashes. The child is the bicycle's driver. Even though a bicycle is not motorized, to get anywhere farther than a few blocks from home, it must be driven in the street, sharing the road with motor vehicles and other drivers. The whole purpose of traffic laws and signaling devices is to make vehicle traffic predictable. So if drivers of both motorized and non-motorized vehicles follow the same laws, then everyone will know what to expect and crashes will be minimized. Last, learning safe bicycling from childhood builds both the skills and the reflexes for teens to be responsible motor-vehicle drivers.

The Top Ten Rules of Bicycle Safety

Wear a **helmet** for every ride and use *lights* at night.

Conduct an **ABC Quick Check** before every ride (see back)

Obey traffic laws: ride on the right, slowest traffic farthest to right

Ride predictably and be visible at all times

At intersections, ride in the right-most lane that goes in your **direction**

Scan for traffic and signal lane changes and turns

Be prepared for mechanical emergencies with **tools and know-how**

Control your bike by practicing **bike handling skills**

Drink before you are thirsty and **eat** before you are hungry

Have fun!

**League of
American
Bicyclists**



ABC

Quick Check

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- ✓ Inflate tires to rated pressure as listed on the sidewall of the tire
- ✓ Use a pressure gauge to insure proper pressure
- ✓ Check for damage to tire tread and sidewall; replace if damaged

b is for brakes

- ✓ Inspect pads for wear; replace if there is less than 1/4 inch of pad left
- ✓ Check pad adjustment; make sure they do not rub tire or dive into spokes
- ✓ Check brake level travel; at least 1 inch between bar and lever when applied

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- ✓ Make sure that your crank bolts are tight; lube the threads only, nothing else
- ✓ Check your chain for wear; 12 links should measure no more than 12 1/8 inches
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