

Walking and Bicycling Resources

Basic Safety Check



It is a good idea to go over your bike before you ride, especially if it has been sitting for a long time or you will be out for a while. Keeping your bicycle in good condition maintains the life of the components, makes it easier for you to ride, and ensures that you can pay attention to the road ahead. Be sure to take your bike to a professional mechanic regularly—this will save you money in the long run, keep you comfortable, and help make sure your bicycle is reliable and safe.

QUICK RELEASES

If you ever take the wheel off your bicycle (e.g. to put it on your car), make sure that the wheel is tightened back on and that you have re-attached the brakes. With the quick-release lever open, firmly seat the axle into the dropout, then slowly close the lever and see if it is tight enough. The correct tightness occurs when you feel some resistance when the lever is perpendicular to the bicycle, but you are still able to close the lever easily. This is very important, as if a wheel is re-seated incorrectly, it could fall off and cause a crash.



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Some bikes come with quick-releases for their seatposts, which are easy to check by pushing on the seat. If it moves, you should tighten the quick-release mechanism.

BRAKES

Make sure that your brakes engage quickly and solidly and that the rims don't rub against them anywhere through their rotation when they are released. If brakes rub, try opening the quick-release, shifting the position of the wheel in the drop-outs, and re-tightening the quick-release lever at the axle. If that doesn't work, you may need to have your wheels professionally trued. Check the condition of the brake pads; they should not be significantly or asymmetrically worn-down. You will likely have to replace your brake pads at least twice a year if you ride regularly (and depending on the conditions when you ride). Make sure the pads are hitting the rims and not the tires or empty space! If your brakes squeak loudly when you pull on them, they need to be adjusted; you can set them to be "toed in" or hitting the rim front-first.



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TIRES

Check the pressure in your tires, either by squeezing them if you are familiar with how hard they feel at the correct pressure, or by using a pressure gauge. Tires will lose pressure just sitting, so you will need to top them off with air every time you ride, or once a week if you ride daily. Also look at the condition of your tires; do they have brittle areas, cuts, or are they bulging in places? If so, don't pump the tubes up to the maximum inflation, and make sure you replace them before riding far. Old or worn tires are susceptible to blow-outs; they will cause loud bang that may shred your tube.

CHECK FOR LOOSE SCREWS

Look at all the parts on your bike and make sure that nothing moves that shouldn't. Check the seat and handlebars for looseness. Tighten the screws on the brakes (if your bike has been sitting for a while, you may want to work some lubricant into the bolts on the brakes and derailleurs before tightening). Check to make sure the headset is tight by holding your front wheel between your legs and trying to twist the handlebars, or by engaging the front brake and pushing the bike forward. You should feel no movement in the headset when you perform these checks. If you do feel movement, see a mechanic right away.

LIGHTS

If you will be riding at night, make sure you have lights with you, and that the mounts are securely installed. Reflectors are always a good idea, and can provide lateral visibility that many lights lack. Replace your batteries often.

HELMET

You should always wear a helmet when you are riding your bicycle. Your helmet should be snug, without any loose straps, and cover your forehead.



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