

Commuter Skills Workshop and Trail Cleanup



Saturday, April 18th, 2009: 1pm-3pm

A Green Apple Festival Event



With Special Thanks To

Arlingtonians for a Clean Environment

12 Cycling Myths, Exposed!

Myth #1: Biking requires too much gear.

Reality: The basic necessities for cycling are just you, a bike and a helmet to protect your noggin. You don't need fancy-schmancy biking gear to ride a bike. Of course, the gear is nice to have, but that can come later. Just get on a bike and go.



Myth #2: It's costly to buy a bike and all the gear for cycling.

Reality: It's actually far cheaper than buying and operating a car. Parking is free. A bike doesn't need gas. It has fewer components and requires less-expensive maintenance.

Myth #3: Only expensive bikes are any good.

Reality: While pricey bikes can be "nicer" to ride, almost any bike in good working condition can get you to where you want to go. Even an old-fashioned single-speed will work. It may just take you longer and you don't have the luxury of gearing up or down for hills, but you will get where you want to go.

Myth #4: Biking takes too much time.

Reality: It does require a little extra planning to ride, but, depending on the distance and traffic, it might actually take less time to bike than it does to drive. Plus, you burn calories and can run errands while you ride.

Myth #5: Biking is too dangerous.

Reality: Most cyclists ride for years without mishap. Acting like a driver, being predictable, wearing bright clothing, being aware of your surroundings, anticipating driver behavior, making eye contact with drivers, having hands ready on brakes, watching for car doors opening, following traffic rules and claiming your lane will help improve your safety.

Myth #6: Bike seats are uncomfortable.

Reality: Bikes generally come with a generic, unisex saddle. If yours feels uncomfortable, try upgrading to one with gel padding or one that's gender specific. Bike seats also come in different sizes and shapes, such as cutaway models.

Myth #7: I'm clueless about how to maintain my bike.

Reality: Maybe so, but it's easy to learn the basics. Sign up for a class at your local bike shop or take advantage of online how-to videos and articles. Or, if bike-maintenance is really not your thing, there's no shame in taking your ride to your local bike shop for a professional tune-up or repair.

Myth #8: I'm too out of shape to ride.

Reality: Riding your bike will help you get back into shape. For a little inspiration, try online savings calculators. In the beginning, don't be afraid to stop and walk—especially on a hill. The more you bike, the easier it will get. Of course, if you have a serious health condition, check with your doctor before riding.

Myth #9: You can't carry much stuff on a bike.

Reality: You'd be surprised how many groceries or work items you can bring on a bike. Start by wearing a daypack or messenger bag, or add a rack and carry your things in panniers or attachable bags. For even bigger loads, consider a bike trailer.

Myth #10: It's too far for me to commute to work.

Reality: You can always ride just part of the way or only one way. Drive to a different starting point to reduce the distance. Catch a ride to work with someone and bike home. Or take the bus—most have a rack in front for bicycles.

Myth #11: I'll get sweaty.

Reality: Sometimes this can be difficult to avoid, but you can always just ride casually to avoid too much exertion. If possible, ride in the morning when it's cooler. Remember, when you're cycling you will usually catch a breeze to help cool off.

Myth #12: My work clothes will get wrinkled.

Reality: If you decide to ride to work, pack along work clothes with fabrics that are less prone to wrinkles when packed, or use packing folders and cubes to reduce wrinkles. On those days when you're driving or going by bus, bring clothes for your bike-riding days so you don't have to carry them on your ride.

Before You Ride

Bike Maintenance

A bike that is in shape makes the ride much more enjoyable. If your bike hasn't been used in a long time or you've noticed a specific problem, take it to your local bike shop for a tune-up. If you want to do the tune-up yourself, take a class or get a book that teaches the basics of bike maintenance.

Pre-ride Inspection

Before taking your bike out for a spin, make sure it's comfortable, safe and ready to go.

1. **Size:** Does the bike fit you? There should be at least 1"-2" of clearance between you and the top tube (bar) on a road bike and at least 2"-4" on a mountain bike.
2. **Seat height:** Check that the saddle (seat) is adjusted at the right height for you.
 - o Personal preference determines whether the saddle should be tipped forward, level or backward.
 - o Having the saddle at the right height and forward/aft position for pedaling is important to your knees. The right position is achieved when, with your leg fully extended (the 6 o'clock position), your knee is just slightly bent.
3. **Wheels:** Make sure the quick-release levers (or bolts on older bikes) are fully secured.
4. **Brakes:** Squeeze the brake levers to see if the brake pads press onto the tire rims or rotors (on disc brakes). The pads hitting the rims/rotors are what make you stop.
5. **Rims:** Lift up the bike and spin the wheels. The rims should be straight and not wobble noticeably from side-to-side or up-and-down.
6. **Tires:** Check for cracks or excessive wear. Make sure they are inflated to the correct pressure (indicated on the tire sidewall).
7. **Frame and headset:** Check the frame for cracks. Hold in the front brake and rock the bike back and forth. Excessive play means the headset needs adjusting. Do not ride a bike with a cracked frame or loose headset.
8. **Gears:** Spin the crank and shift through the gears. The chain should transfer smoothly from gear to gear.
9. **Cranks:** These are the arms attaching the pedals to the bike. Give each one a pull to make sure they're tight. Do not ride a bike with a loose crank.
10. **Chain:** Make sure it is lubricated. Rotate the crank backwards and look for hitches in the movement.

Fit Your Helmet

A helmet can only work if you wear it. In fact, helmets are 85-88% effective in preventing head and brain injuries. (Source: The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, www.nhtsa.gov.) Also, some state or local laws require a helmet, and you could even get a ticket if you don't wear one.

Tip: For your state and selected international info, visit the Bicycle Helmet Safety Institute's Web site, www.helmets.org/mandator.htm.

It's also important to have it fit properly. Heads come in different sizes and so do helmets, so get the right size.

Here are the basic steps:

- Adjust the fit dial or cinching mechanism (or add/remove interior pads if provided) so the helmet fits snugly, but comfortably.
- The helmet should be level on your head, about 1 or 2 finger-widths above the eyebrow. If it falls below the eyebrows, it is too big. If it does not reach to just above the eyebrows, it is too small.
- Where the straps form a "Y," make sure the slider is just under the earlobe.
- A buckled chinstrap should be snug with no more than 1 or 2 fingers width space between the chin and the strap.
- Final checks:
 - Shake your head. If the helmet moves to a different position, readjust so it's more secure.
 - You should be able to open your mouth wide without the chinstrap pulling the helmet down.

In the United States, helmets must meet the standards of the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CSPC), American National Standards Institute (ANSI, formerly American Society for Testing and Materials [ASTM]), or the Snell Foundation (a nonprofit promoting helmet safety). Look inside the helmet for one of these labels.

Tip: For children, don't buy one "to grow into." Get one that fits right for proper protection.

Pick a Safe Route

It may be a no-brainer on which route you want to take, but if you're not sure:

Ask a Fellow Cyclist: If there is a friend or coworker who already bikes to work, talk to him or her. Contact a local biking club or bike shop. Sometimes they will have local insights you can't find online.

Go Online: Check the Web sites of local biking clubs, city transportation departments or your state's Department of Transportation. Message boards can be helpful, too. Ones in your area can assist you with routes or answer questions you might have.

When selecting your route, consider road construction, heavy traffic, crime problem areas, dogs, hills and whether or not the streets have a bike lane or shoulder.

Tip: Try Google's directions at maps.google.com, zoom into your area then type your start and end address. Click and drag on it to change routes. You get a route and mileage totals, too.

Take a Practice Spin

To ride a bike, you just need to know how to pedal, steer and stop. Follow the rules of the road and be aware of your surroundings.

Most likely you've ridden a bike, but if you haven't or are just a bit rusty, practice first.

- Find a vacant parking lot, sidewalk or paved biking trail that is not crowded.
- Get a feel for the brakes—squeeze the levers slowly and gently. When braking, squeeze the rear brake first and then the front brake. Stopping quickly with the front brake only can cause the front tire to lock and the rear tire to rise up. And that means you could go over the handlebars!
- Coast with your feet in the air and get a feel of steering and balance.
- Next try using the pedals, steering and then the brakes. Avoid braking and steering at the same time, especially with the front brake.
- If using clip-in pedals, practice clipping in and unclipping, releasing and stopping.
- Before going on the road and in traffic, practice starting and stopping uphill and downhill.

Tip: Keep the pedals in a horizontal position when braking. This helps provide more braking power and keeps your feet away from any road hazards.

Riding Tips

Next, get on your bike and go. Go to a store for an errand, bike to a friend's house or meet someone for coffee. Give yourself a goal. On weekends, you might want to bike to your workplace to get a feel for what it would be commuting during the week (remember, traffic will most likely be heavier when biking during commute hours).

If you do want to cycle to work, consider just trying it one-way in the beginning. Take the bus or have someone drop you and your bike at work in the morning, and then try biking home when you don't have the pressure of getting to work on time.

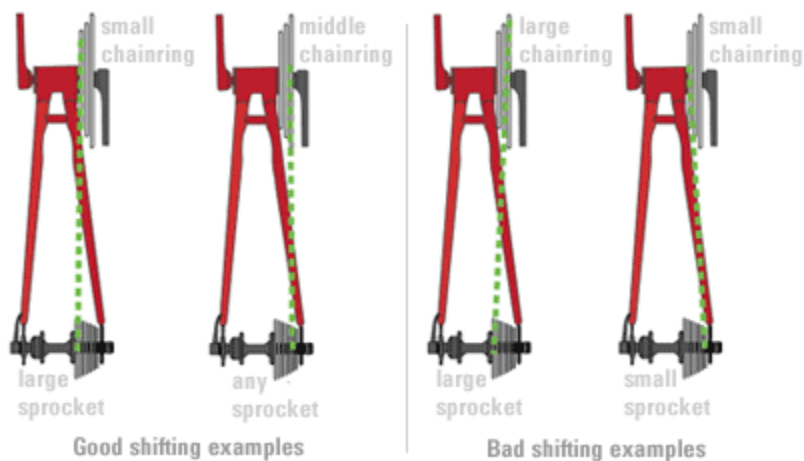
Tip: Find a friend or co-worker who can be a mentor, someone who can advise and encourage you. Consider a basic road biking class.

Shifting Gears

Shifting at the optimum times will make your ride easier. You don't want to be pedaling in a high gear when going uphill; you'll be exhausted. You want to use a lower gear so you aren't pushing on the pedals so hard.

You'll also have more fun when cruising on the downhill in a high gear at a fast speed. The easier it is to pedal, the more you can shift up. Or, you can take the downhill slowly and pump the brakes to decrease speed.

Whatever gear combination you're using, try to keep the chain so it is not being stretched diagonally. For instance, avoid being on a high chainring and first gear (as shown in this top-view illustration). This approach encourages a longer chainring life.



If you have a bike computer on your bike, you can check the cadence (the number of times your pedals go around per minute). The most efficient cadence, or pedaling rate, is between 70 to 90 revolutions per minute.

Riding in Traffic

Maybe you're one of the lucky ones who have a designated bike path to use or a marked bike lane. But at some time or some place, you'll probably have to ride in traffic.

It's really not that scary. In general, bicyclists follow the same rules of the road as car drivers. Just pretend you're driving your car instead of your bike. In this way, drivers know what to expect, and it's safer for everyone. Riding guidelines:

- Go with traffic, not against it.
- Follow traffic signals, signs and pavement markings.
- Yield to pedestrians and other vehicles.
- Get off of the road when you're not moving.
- Don't pass on the right.
- Watch what is happening behind you. To make this easier, consider wearing a helmet-mounted or eyeglass-mounted mirror.
- If there are more than 5 cars behind you, pull over and let them pass.
- Ride straight, and don't swerve in and out of traffic.
- When turning, slowing or stopping, use hand signals to let others know what you are doing.

Basic Hand Signals



- Look back over your shoulder, especially when changing lanes or making a turn.
- Wear something bright; don't expect drivers to see you.
- Watch for vehicles coming out of alleys, they may not see you.
- Make noise—use a horn, bell or whistle or yell.
- Semi-trucks have a blind spot when they are turning; stay out of the blind spot.
- If a vehicle blocks your view, move to the side or slow down to see around it.
- Be ready to brake, keeping your hands near or on the brake levers so you can stop fast.
- To see hazards, keep at least 4 feet of distance between you and any vehicle.
- Pedal strong when going through intersections.
- Watch for drivers who forget to signal.
- Be predictable.

Tip: Just because you're on a bike, doesn't mean you can't be cited for a traffic violation. Follow the rules of the road.

Lane Position

This is a common discussion among cyclists, especially those of us who ride only occasionally. Our thoughts:

- Stay to the right when lanes are wide and there is lots of room. This allows vehicles to pass you most easily.
- Claim the lane (i.e., ride in the center of the lane) in these situations: where roads are too narrow for cars to safely pass; you're in a tunnel, underpass or dark area; when a parked car's doors are opening; where there are sewer grates, uneven shoulders and debris; or if you're moving at the same speed as the traffic. This makes you more visible and more likely to be passed only when there is enough room.

Riding Hazards

- Do not use headphones. Listen to your surroundings.
- Watch and listen for car doors opening. Don't ride closer than 4 feet to a car, and listen for hints of movement.
- Watch for ground hazards like drain grates that can catch your tire.
- Don't follow a vehicle so closely that you have a blind spot. You may not see a hazard (e.g., a pothole) until it's too late.
- Watch for debris or rough roadways.
- Try to cross railroad tracks at a 90-degree angle to avoid catching a tire.
- When riding on a highway and being passed by a large truck or bus, be prepared to be pulled to the left from the vehicle's wake.
- When passing other cyclists or walkers, ring a bell or announce "on your left" so they don't swerve into you.
- Keep space between you and other cyclists.

Darkness and Bad Weather

You want to see and be seen when visibility is poor:

- Use a white front light and a red, flashing rear light.
- Consider a headlamp or helmet-mounted headlight to give you more light and to help gain a driver's attention.
- Have reflectors on both the front and rear of your bike. New bikes come with them, but you may want to add more for extra visibility.
- Increase visibility by adding reflectors or reflective tape on moving parts of your bike.
- Wear bright clothing.
- Wear a reflective vest, jacket, wristbands and/or leg bands.

In wet or cold weather:

- Give yourself extra room in rain, ice, frost, snow or fog. When it is wet, the pavement will be oily and slippery. Your brakes will be wet, too.
- Bridges and overpasses will be icier than roads.

The Bus and the Biker

Some bike commuters do a combination of cycling and taking a bus. Most buses have a front rack to hold bicycles. While there are usually instructions printed on the bike rack, it is up to you to load your bike properly. Bikes with child carriers or no-spoke wheels usually cannot be put on the rack. Some bikes with wide handlebars or long wheelbases might not fit.

- Prepare the bike for loading before the bus arrives. Remove all loose items (pumps, helmets, water bottles, etc.).
- Do not step in front of the bus until the driver sees you.
- Load your bike in the spot closest to the bus or in the next open position.
- Lift the support arm and hook it over the front tire. Make sure the support arm clamps the tire, not the frame or fender.
- At your stop, remind the driver you will be unloading your bike before you exit.
- Remove the support arm, lower it into place and remove your bike. Fold the rack up if it is empty.
- Step onto the sidewalk and wait for the bus to leave.

If you're just riding to the park-and-ride, look for a secure way to store your bike there after you hop a bus or do a carpool or vanpool. Some transit facilities have lockers for this purpose.

Parking and Locking Your Bike

No matter where you ride, it's a good idea to secure your bike.

- If commuting, try to keep your bike in your office or other secured area.
- If you are parking outside, use a bike rack or some other secure, unmovable object and ideally lock BOTH wheels and the frame to it.
 - Always lock it to something—don't lock just the bike—as it is easy to pick up and carry away.
 - Remember, aluminum or wooden posts, trees or to chain link fences might look secure, but they can be cut by determined thieves.
 - Check with the local police department for rules on where bikes can be parked and locked. Some places may be illegal.
- Use either a cable lock, a U-lock, one of each, 2 U-locks and/or a combo lock. The more time and trouble it takes a thief to attack your bike lock, the less likely it is will be taken.
- Try to lock it in a well-lighted, well-traveled location.

- Some parking lots offer a place for bikes at a reduced parking rate.
- Unfasten and carry with you any parts that can be easily removed—bike bag, pump, computer, lights or quick-release seat.

Tips:

- Register your bike's serial number with the National Bike Registry (www.nationalbikeregistry.com). If your bike gets stolen and is later recovered, no matter where, it can be returned to you.
- Even if you don't need a lock during the workday, have one with you in case you stop somewhere along your route.
- Do not use a lock larger than you really need. A tight-fitting lock makes it more difficult for thieves to get their tools into position to try breaking the lock.
- If you have a tubular pin-tumbler-style lock made in 2004 or earlier, you should replace it. Thieves have figured out how to disable these locks.

Taking It to the Next Level

OK, you've taken a few short rides, and now you're ready for more. This is the time to start thinking about a few of the extras that will make your rides more comfortable.

Core Repair Items

Unless you're just riding around the block, you should always carry these items.

- Mini-pump
- Spare tube or a tire-patch kit
- Tire levers
- Cycling multi-tool (with Allen wrenches)

Tip: If purchasing a spare tube, make sure you choose a compatible size. Tire/tube size information can be found on the sidewall of most tires.

Core Gear

Bring some or all of these based on your needs.

- Eye protection (sunglasses and clear lenses)
- Water: For a short ride, carry a water bottle attached in a bottle cage. For longer rides, you may want a hydration pack.
- Snacks or energy food
- Sunscreen
- Medical info/emergency contact card
- Cell phone (for when you don't feel like changing a tire and want to call a friend or taxi).

Bike Clothing

For casual rides or short commutes, you may want to just wear your casual/work clothes. For longer rides or commutes, wear more traditional cycling gear for greater riding comfort. You can always change at your workplace or destination if necessary.

Recommendations in approximate order of usefulness:

- Biking shorts or pants: For longer rides, you will want the extra comfort.
- Moisture-wicking jersey: Helps keep you dry and regulate body temperature while riding.
- Padded gloves: These absorb vibration and keep your fingers warm.
- Socks: Lightweight, synthetic styles help wick moisture away from your skin.
- Jacket or vest: This depends on weather conditions.
- Cycling shoes: Commuter shoes or cleats make pedaling more efficient.

- Bike booties: These fit over your bike shoes for extra water-resistance.
- Helmet liner: Wear this under your helmet on cold days.
- Tights or leg warmers: Added insulation for cooler days.

Tips:

- Dress in layers so you can add or remove clothing as weather and your body temperature change.
- Use shoes that have no vents or holes to keep feet warmer.

Other Gear

Recommendations in approximate order of need:

- Bell, horn or whistle: A cyclist's version of a car horn.
- Mirror: To see what's behind you. Attach one to your helmet, glasses or handlebars.
- Fenders: Protection from mud and water.
- Extra reflectors: Most bikes come with some, but you can add more for extra visibility.
- Headlight: Helps you see and be seen.
- Taillight: Helps you be seen better at night or dusk.
- Extra batteries: For headlights and taillights.
- Cargo rack: A good base for carrying groceries and gear.
- Trailers: For hauling the kids, dog or your gear.
- Clip-in pedals and cycling shoes: For greater pedaling efficiency.
- Bike computer: Takes the guesswork out of your distance and speed, plus offers other data.

How to Carry Your Gear

This depends on your personal preferences and how much you want to take with you:

- Underseat bag (a.k.a. saddlebag): Fits directly under the saddle. Usually used to hold core repair items and other small necessities.
- Rack trunk: With a rack on the rear, these bags fit directly on top and hold enough small gear for many riders.
- Panniers: Attach to the rack on the back of your bike. They are a great solution for groceries or larger amounts of work/touring gear.
- Front rack bag: Attach to a rack over the front tire, much like panniers.
- Messenger bag (laptop messenger): Has a long strap to sling over your shoulder; some have additional padded strap to carry it like a briefcase. Interior compartments are usually designed to hold a laptop and other office needs. Others have enough room to fit a towel, shoes and clothes, too.
- Daypack: Conveniently attaches to you rather than the bike.

- Handlebar bag: Attaches to the handlebar to carry small items for easy access. Some have a clear, waterproof compartment so you can see your map or shopping list.
- Baskets: Come in versions that can attach to the handlebars or to a rack on back. Some are detachable with a handle, so you could use it as a shopping basket, too.

Arriving at Work or Your Destination

Cleaning Up: If you're fortunate enough to have showers at your workplace, you have it easy. If not, you're not completely out of luck. Try these suggestions:

- The “birdbath” option: Just use a washcloth, small towel and a bathroom sink to freshen up.
- Pre-moistened towelettes can work in a pinch.
- Join a nearby gym. Some gyms will even sell you a “shower only” membership at a reduced rate.
- Keep your cleaning and priming supplies at the workplace or gym so you do not have to carry them on the commute, too.
- If you can't wash up as much as you'd like, consider taking your bike on the bus with you in the morning, and then bike home after work when it doesn't matter if you get sweaty.

Dressing Up:

- You can either carry your work clothes with you, or you can shuttle a supply of fresh clothes to your workplace on a non-biking day. If you do not have a locker room, try your desk, a closet, behind a door or even between partitions for storage.
- Try to use clothing that is less likely to wrinkle.
- Keep extra shoes at the workplace.
- Keep a set of clean undies, socks and accessories at the workplace in case you forget one day.

Biking Q&A

Q: Is a more expensive helmet safer?

A: No, all helmets are designed to meet the standards of the CSPC, ANSI or Snell Foundation. Helmets increase in price for comfort or performance features such as more ventilation or less weight.

Q: What should I do if it rains?

A: You don't have to bike that day, or you can dress in cycling rain gear and still ride comfortably.

Q: What if there are no showers at my work?

A: If you can, ride to work at a casual pace so you don't get too sweaty. You can ride home at a faster pace for a better workout. Some people don't shower, others find a nearby gym.

Q: Isn't biking on the road a risky proposition?

A: By riding responsibly, predictably and with caution, you'll greatly reduce your risk.

Q: What's the best way to carry groceries or work home?

A: There are many types of gear-carrying solutions for bikes, ranging from daypacks to panniers. For carrying kids, dogs or really big gear loads, consider a bike trailer.

Q: Where can I learn about bicycle repair?

A: Your local bike shop may offer regular clinics and classes, or check with the League of American Bicycles for their class info.

Q: When should I replace my helmet? When is it too old?

A: At the very least, replace your helmet every 5 years. However, if you've been in a crash, you should replace your helmet immediately. Also, if the padding or straps are worn or if there are any indications of breakdown in the foam, you should replace it.

Resources

Bicycling Organizations and Resources

BicycleSafe - How to Not Get Hit By Cars: www.bicyclesafe.com

Washington Area Bicyclists Association: www.waba.org

Potomac Pedalers Touring Club: www.bikeptc.org

BikeArlington: www.bikearlington.com

Phoenix Bikes: www.phoenixbikes.org

Bicycling Books

How to Live Well Without Owning a Car, by Chris Balish

Effective Cycling, by John Forester

Urban Bikers' Tricks & Trips, by Mr. Bike, Dave Glowacz

Zinn and the Art of Road Bike Maintenance, by Lennard Zinn

The Art of Cycling: A Guide to Bicycling in 21st Century America, by Robert Hurst

Big Blue Book of Bicycle Repair, by C. Calvin Jones

Bicycling Magazine's Complete Guide to Maintenance, 5th Edition, by Todd Downs

Simple Bicycle Repair: Fixing your Bike Made Easy, by Rob van der Plas

Bicycle Repair Step-by-Step, by Rob van der Plas