

Safety

Shots

Safety is no Accident!

Bicycle Safety

Linda Johnston

Bicycle safety is essential for anyone who rides, whether it's for recreation, commuting, or sport. Cyclists are particularly vulnerable on the road, as they share space with vehicles and pedestrians. Proper safety gear, awareness of traffic laws, and responsible riding habits are all critical in reducing the risk of accidents and ensuring a safe experience.

The most important piece of safety equipment for any cyclist is a helmet. A properly fitted helmet can significantly reduce the risk of head injuries in the event of a fall or collision. The helmet should be snug but comfortable, with the straps properly adjusted so that the helmet stays in place during an accident. While helmets do not prevent all injuries, they offer significant protection against the most severe consequences of a crash. Other protective gear, such as knee pads, elbow pads, and gloves, can offer extra protection, especially for more aggressive riders or those riding off-road or in rough conditions.

Visibility is another important aspect of bicycle safety. Cyclists should ensure they are visible to other road users, particularly in low-light conditions like early morning, dusk, or night riding. Reflective gear, bright clothing, and lights are vital in making sure you can be seen by drivers, pedestrians, and other cyclists. Front and rear lights are recommended, as well as reflective tape or stickers on your bike. A rear red light and front white light are often legally required in many places, but they are important for your safety regardless of the law. Cyclists should also be mindful of the weather, as rain or fog can reduce visibility for both cyclists and motorists.

Understanding and following traffic laws is crucial to safe cycling. Cyclists should always obey stop signs, red lights, and other traffic signals, just as vehicles must. In many places, cyclists are required to ride in the same direction as traffic, on the right side of the road,

and follow lane markings. It's also essential to use hand signals to communicate turns or lane changes to other road users. When riding near pedestrians, it is a good idea to have an audible warning device, such as a bell to alert pedestrians to your presence, avoiding any unnecessary accidents. Cyclists should also be cautious of hazards in the road, like potholes, gravel, debris, or railroad and streetcar tracks, and avoid weaving between vehicles, as this can lead to dangerous situations. Knowing the local laws and regulations can help you ride safely and responsibly.

Maintaining your bike is a key part of staying safe. Regularly checking the brakes, tires, and chain will help ensure that the bike is in good working condition. Flat tires, worn-out brake pads, or a loose chain can be a recipe for disaster, particularly when riding at high speeds or in traffic. Before each ride, it's a good habit to do a quick safety check — sometimes referred to as the ABCs: Air (tires), Brakes, and Chain. Regular tune-ups at a bike shop will also help maintain the longevity and safety of your bicycle.

By using the right safety equipment, staying visible, following traffic laws, and keeping your bike in good working order, you can reduce the risk of accidents and enjoy cycling more safely. Whether you're on a leisurely ride or navigating busy city streets, being mindful of these safety tips will help you stay protected on the road.

Linda Johnston is a long-time skier and ski club activist and has led many group trips to ski destinations in North and South America. She raised her two sons on Arizona and Colorado ski hills. Linda is a doctor of physical therapy, practicing in orthopedics for over 40 years in Phoenix, Arizona.