



## ACSM Information On...

# GETTING STARTED WITH CYCLING

Cycling is an excellent form of aerobic exercise and transportation that offers a variety of health and fitness benefits. Care taken in selection and fit of the bicycle, safety, equipment and clothing can help make starting a cycling program successful, and lead to lifelong enjoyment of cycling.

### A Complete Physical Activity Program

A well-rounded physical activity program includes aerobic exercise and strength training exercise, but not necessarily in the same session. This blend helps maintain or improve cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness and overall health and function. Regular physical activity will provide more health benefits than sporadic, high intensity workouts, so choose exercises you are likely to enjoy and that you can incorporate into your schedule.

ACSM's physical activity recommendations for healthy adults, updated in 2011, recommend at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity (working hard enough to break a sweat, but still able to carry on a conversation) five days per week, or 20 minutes of more vigorous activity three days per week. Combinations of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity can be performed to meet this recommendation.

Examples of typical aerobic exercises are:

- Walking
- Running
- Stair climbing
- Cycling
- Rowing
- Cross-country skiing
- Swimming

In addition, strength training should be performed a minimum of two days each week, with 8-12 repetitions of 8-10 different exercises that target all major muscle groups. This type of training can be accomplished using body weight, resistance bands, free weights, medicine balls or weight machines.

### Selecting a Bicycle

Bikes come in many forms including:

- **Racing Cycles:** high performance bikes that sacrifice comfort for speed, such as time trial or triathlon bikes.
- **Road Bikes:** narrow tires with low rolling resistance. They are built for riding specifically on paved roads. They are typically designed for long distance cycling and can also be used for racing. You will see this form of bike in events such as the Tour de France. Lighter bikes are faster, but also more expensive. Another bike type in this category is the touring bike, designed to be ridden long distances on paved roads, and carry gear.
- **Mountain Bikes:** have wider tires with more grip and are intended for off-road, use. Mountain bikes can handle most any type terrain or incline, but the wider tires make them slower and noisy on paved roads
- **Hybrid:** a combination of both road and mountain bicycles. They can be ridden both on and off road, and have some of the benefits of both, but are not as fast on the road nor as nimble on trails.
- **Commuter Bikes:** may be fitted with lights, fenders racks or gear carriers that make commuting easier. They tend to be sturdy/safe bikes that can withstand tough day to day usage.

Deciding which bicycle is right for you depends on a number of factors including: speed, type of terrain, comfort, off or on road cycling, recreational or competitive cycling, and price. Regardless of the type of bike you choose, it needs to fit. A bicycle that fits you well can make cycling more enjoyable and can reduce chance of injury. A reputable bicycle shop can do a basic fitting for you, or you can spend upwards of \$200 for a custom fitting session. Check with your local cycling clubs to inquire about which shop may provide good fitting services.

Other features or items to consider: clipless pedals, water bottle holders (cages , pumps, spare tires/tubes, bike tools, bike computer or speedometers, etc.) Women should get a female specific saddle that accommodates a wider pelvis, trying to ride on a men's saddle will guarantee discomfort.

### Safety

Your bicycle needs to be checked before every ride to ensure road safety. Maintain tire pressures and pump and replace tires and tubes as needed, lubricate the chain and check for loose connections. The wheels need to be aligned, and adjusted as needed by a bike mechanic. Bicycles share the road with cars, and this can be a major safety hazard. Be visible with bright clothing and reflectors and lights. Follow the rules of the road as

designated by state or local authorities, obeying traffic signals and signs as if you were in a car. A good safety resource is the League of American Bicyclists, ([www.bikeleague.org/](http://www.bikeleague.org/)). Always wear a bike helmet. Bike helmets are relatively cheap and can be a life saver. The bike shop can fit you with a proper bike helmet.

## Clothing

Experienced cyclists commonly wear coordinated compression shorts and jerseys while riding or racing. This type of clothing is designed to optimize aerodynamics, comfort and visibility, but is not required.

- Cyclists are encouraged to use padded cycling shorts alone or under shorts to improve comfort while sitting on the bicycle seat and to prevent painful skin chafing (these are typically worn without underwear).
- Cycling jerseys are designed to be snug and not flap in the wind, but accommodate clothing layers. Jerseys typically have pockets in the back to hold belongings and clothing layers such as a rain jacket. Depending on weather conditions, you may find yourself adding or removing layers of clothing. Dress in layers to allow for adequate temperature regulation. Try not to overheat, but also remember that you will be cooled by the wind so may need to wear more than you would to go out for a walk in similar weather circumstances.
- Padded gloves cushion against some of the bumps on rough roads, and protect the hands if you fall.
- Sunglasses or clear/colored glasses depending on the weather protect the eyes from flying road debris and road glare.

- Cyclists typically use specific cycling shoes, which have clips to attach them to the pedals. Any shoe is fine to start, but the stiff sole and connection to the pedal of a cycling shoe is recommended as you get more comfortable on the bike.
- As with any outdoor sport, use sunscreen. The backs of the arms and the outside of the calves are exposed more in cycling than in other sports.

## Now you're ready to ride

New cyclists can be disappointed that despite having a bike fitted for them they still have discomfort on the bike, and this can be a disincentive to riding regularly. Like any activity, it can take time to get used to cycling. The points of contact with the bike are typical areas of discomfort, primarily the seat. Padded shorts and saddles can only help somewhat, there will need to be a period of adaptation. Do not go out on longer rides until you have adapted to the bicycle. Start with 15-20 minutes and increase speed and distance as you feel comfortable. Arms, shoulders and neck are also areas of discomfort. Try not to lock your arms, and change hand position on the handlebars frequently. New cyclists typically do not like shoes that lock into the pedals. Make sure you are comfortable on the bike and practice removing your foot frequently before you get shoes that clip into the bike.

Learn how to change a bicycle tire, and carry a spare tube, patch kit and pump. Flat tires are unfortunately common, and should not have to ruin your ride.

## Staying Active Pays Off!

Those who are physically active tend to live longer, healthier lives. Research shows that moderate physical activity – such as 30 minutes a day of brisk walking – significantly contributes to longevity. Even a person with risk factors like high blood pressure, diabetes or even a smoking habit can gain real benefits from incorporating regular physical activity into their daily life.

As many dieters have found, exercise can help you stay on a diet and lose weight. What's more – regular exercise can help lower blood pressure, control blood sugar, improve cholesterol levels and build stronger, denser bones.

## The First Step

Before you begin an exercise program, take a fitness test, or substantially increase your level of activity, make sure to answer the following questions. This physical activity readiness questionnaire (PAR-Q) will help determine if you're ready to begin an exercise routine or program.

- Has your doctor ever said that you have a heart condition or that you should participate in physical activity only as recommended by a doctor?
- Do you feel pain in your chest during physical activity?
- In the past month, have you had chest pain when you were not doing physical activity?
- Do you lose your balance from dizziness? Do you ever lose consciousness?
- Do you have a bone or joint problem that could be made worse by a change in your physical activity?
- Is your doctor currently prescribing drugs for your blood pressure or a heart condition?
- Do you know of any reason you should not participate in physical activity?

If you answered yes to one or more questions, if you are over 40 years of age and have recently been inactive, or if you are concerned about your health, consult a physician before taking a fitness test or substantially increasing your physical activity. If you answered no to each question, then it's likely that you can safely begin exercising.

## Prior to Exercise

Prior to beginning any exercise program, including the activities depicted in this brochure, individuals should seek medical evaluation and clearance to engage in activity. Not all exercise programs are suitable for everyone, and some programs may result in injury. Activities should be carried out at a pace that is comfortable for the user. Users should discontinue participation in any exercise activity that causes pain or discomfort. In such event, medical consultation should be immediately obtained.



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