



Get **cycling**

A guide to choosing and using your bike





buying the right bike for you


Be admired for the car you don't drive.


Buy the right bike and it'll become your indispensable travelling companion and take you everywhere.

Before you buy, think about when you want to use your bike and where you want it to take you. Your bike should complement your lifestyle.

Each section covers a different subject and is colour coded on the top right hand page. Use it to help find your way around.

 buying the right bike for you

 getting your bike set up

 love your bike

 accessories

 what to wear

 where can I go?

 where do I find out more?





Different bikes have different uses. Choose the type of bike which reflects the majority of journeys you intend to make. And remember, as with most things, you get what you pay for, and sometimes bikes come with lots of extra features that you might not need.

Road bikes are lightweight with skinny tyres. Most have drop handlebars and they're designed to be aerodynamic and speedy. Racing bikes are lightweight and fast. Touring bikes are sturdier versions of racing bikes suitable for long distance rides with panniers.

Mountain bikes have sturdy frames, knobby tyres and highly effective brakes. They often have suspension and a wide selection of lower gears, perfect for all types of terrain. With slick tyres they are also comfortable for city riding.

Hybrid bikes are a cross between the speed of a road bike and the strength and gearing of a mountain bike. They are lightweight but sturdy with smooth tyres and an upright riding position suitable for a wide variety of terrain. A good everyday option.

Folding bikes are ideal for people who commute on public transport but use their bikes at either end of their trip. These bikes fold down compactly, and have smaller wheels and fewer gears.

Electrically assisted bikes are great if you need extra help to get up hills, or have a longer daily commute. Choose a bike that is electrically assisted, where the power kicks in when you pedal, helping you up the hill rather than completely taking over.



Panniers are small luggage bags that can be attached to your bicycle.



Road bike



Mountain bike



Hybrid bike



Folding bike

the perfect size for the right ride

The most important thing is to buy the right size frame for you.

Unlike children's bikes, there are no standard guidelines on different size frames. The size of frame depends on the type of bike you want, and the type of riding you will be doing.

If you need to stop quickly you'll be glad that you chose a frame size that gave you clearance from the cross bar of at least an inch or more. For mountain biking you'll need even more clearance since you'll be putting your feet down quite a lot.

Once you have the right size frame, the handlebars and seat should be adjusted for comfort, pedal-power and control.



Tip

Ask your local bike shop for a test ride before you buy.



The **cross bar** is the main tube on the bicycle frame that runs from the saddle to the handlebars. Traditionally women's frames don't have a cross bar.

getting your bike set up

Getting the right size of bike is the first step. By making a few simple adjustments your bike will be a perfect fit.



Tip

Make sure you can still reach the brake levers once you've adjusted your handlebars!

riding position

Your riding position can be altered by adjusting the saddle and handlebars.

There are three things you want to achieve:

- 1 The right saddle height - to make the most of your leg power or to make sure you can put a reassuring foot on the ground;
- 2 Good contact with your pedals - to maximise the power in your legs;
- 3 Ability to reach the handlebars and your brakes - for good control and comfort.

Everyone is different so you will need to find a comfortable balance that suits you.

handlebar position

Well positioned handlebars are crucial for your comfort, and important for control of your steering and brakes.

Handlebars vary in how they can be adjusted. A good position to start is with your handle bars at the same height as your saddle. If you prefer a more aerodynamic 'head down' position, lower the bars. If you want a 'head up' riding position that's easier on your back and gives confidence in traffic, raise the bars.



saddle position

Getting the saddle in the right place will help you get the most from your pedal power without straining your body.

Bikes have a handy feature that allows you to move the saddle forwards or backwards and adjust its angle. Adjust the saddle so your leg pushes vertically down on the pedal. If you find you want to slide forward or backwards as you ride, adjust the saddle to suit.

Use an adjustable spanner or an allen key (depending on your bike) to loosen the bolt underneath the saddle at the top of the seat post. You can then slide your saddle backwards or forwards and tilt it up or down. Tighten it well before trying!

adjusting saddle height

To find the right height for your saddle:

- 1 Place your bike next to a large wall;
- 2 Hop on and put one hand on the wall for balance;
- 3 Put the ball of your foot on the pedal at its lowest point without stretching. Your leg should be straight. If you find you're rocking from side to side when you ride, you're probably too high and cycling will be harder work.

To adjust the height of your saddle undo the bolt or quick release at the top of the frame so you can slide the seat post up or down, making sure you don't go past the minimum mark. If your seat needs to be higher than the seat post allows, you need a longer seat post or a bigger bike.

different saddles

Women tend to have wider hips than men, and so women's saddles are wider than men's for the correct fit. Do make sure your saddle is comfortable – it can make all the difference to the enjoyment of riding your bike.



care for it and it will care for you

Like any machine, a bike will work better and last longer if you care for it properly. Get in the habit of checking your bike regularly - simple checks and maintenance can help you have hassle-free riding and avoid repairs.



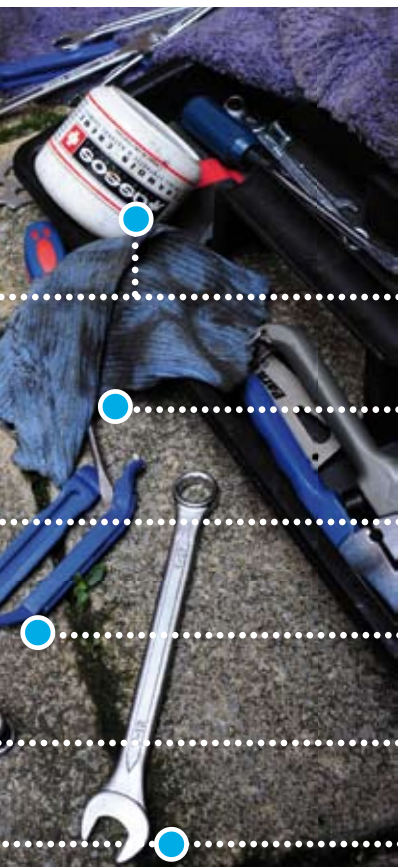
Tip

If in doubt, leave it to the professionals. Bike mechanics are much more affordable than car mechanics, and some will even collect your bike from home and return it when all the work is done.





love your bike



tools

There are specialist tools for specific tasks, but all you need to get started are:

- a pump
- an old toothbrush
- lubricants and grease
- cleaning rags
- puncture repair kit
- tyre levers
- allen keys and screwdrivers
- spanners



Tyre levers

are small plastic tools that attach to the spokes of your wheel and help to ease the tyre away from your wheel rim. Tyre levers are really helpful if you have a puncture.

An **allen key**, also known as a **hex** or **zeta key** is a tool used to drive screws and bolts that have a hexagonal socket in the head and are extremely handy for maintaining bicycles.



regular checks



every week

Check your tyres, brakes, lights, handlebars and seat are in good order and tightly secured. Any wheel quick releases must be in the closed position.

Do your light batteries need replacing or your tyres need more air? Are your brakes squeezing the rim of the wheel (if they're touching the tyre that's not good) and are your handlebars and saddle secure?



every month

Give your chain a really good wipe clean and lubricate with chain oil;

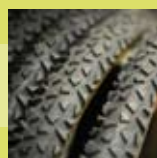
Wipe the dirt from your wheels;

Check the tread on your tyres - any bulges or bald spots mean that you need new tyres;

Check your brake pads aren't touching the tyres, and check there is still life in the pads - if not change them;

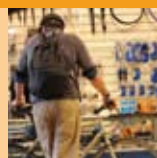
Are your gears changing smoothly? If you're having problems with your gears, it's best to leave gear adjustments and repairs to a bike mechanic;

Check for damaged or frayed gear or brake cables.



every year

It's worth taking your bike to an experienced mechanic once a year for a thorough service. All good bike shops will have a mechanic who can answer any questions you might have.





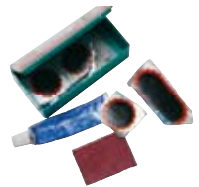
fixing a puncture

Punctures don't happen often and are easy to fix yourself.

If you don't fancy repairing a puncture on your journey, carry a spare inner tube and a pump so you can change the tube, then fix the puncture when you get home.

If you don't mind repairing punctures when they happen, make sure you carry your repair kit and pump at all times. All puncture repair kits have full instructions with pictures.

Alternatively, if you don't want to get your hands dirty just take it to your local bike shop and they will fix it for you.



Tip

A fully inflated tyre makes life so much easier and reduces punctures. Even a slightly under-inflated tyre will slow you down.



Tip

Go easy with the oil! Be careful not to get any oil on wheel rims or brake pads. If you do, just clean it off with some lubricant spray and a rag.



Tip

Carry a spare inner tube and some tyre levers with you so you don't have to repair a puncture immediately.





don't lose it, lock it!

There are three simple ways of cutting the risk of bike theft:

- 1 A good lock;
- 2 Using it effectively;
- 3 Choosing the right location.

Always lock your bike and remove lights and panniers.

Almost 400,000 bikes are stolen every year in England and Wales, so taking precautions will help keep your bike safe.

Invest in a strong lock. Some locks are stronger than others and price influences their quality. D-locks are sturdy, and cable locks are useful to secure any parts of the bike which are quick release such as the saddle or front wheel.

Think: location, location, location. Where you lock your bike is critical. Leave it on a well lit and busy street so any potential thieves are conspicuous.

Home insurance policies can often easily be extended to include your bike when it is at home. Take a photo of the bike and write down the frame number.

Bike insurance policies are available and cover your bike when you're out and about. Find out more at www.sustrans.org.uk



Tip

Replace quick releases with regular bolts to make them more secure.



Tip

Never leave home without your lock!

never leave home
without your
essential accessories!



Accessorising is the key to any good outfit and riding a bike is no different. Carefully chosen extras can transform any bike from a leisure vehicle into a valuable year-round mode of transport.

helmet

A helmet will not prevent accidents from happening but can provide protection if you do fall off your bike. They are particularly recommended for young children.

Ultimately, wearing a helmet is a question of individual choice and parents need to make that choice for their children.

Always buy a new helmet which conforms to one of the recognised safety standards such as BS or CE, fits well, and is comfortable.

If your helmet takes a bash, always replace it as it will not offer the same protection.

bell

A bell is a must for any considerate cyclist. A friendly tinkle will let people know you're approaching, but never assume they can hear you.





pop it in your pannier!

Rucksacks are fine for carrying light loads but can make you hot. For heavier loads, longer or more regular journeys, panniers are recommended. If you don't want to invest in panniers, strap your rucksack to a bike rack, or put a basket on the front. If you want to carry really heavy loads use a bike trailer.

lights

See and be seen! When cycling in the dark, you are required by law to have a white light on the front and a red light on the rear. These can clip onto your bike, backpack or your clothes.

mudguards

A lot of bikes are still sold without mudguards, so you'll need to get a pair fitted if you want to avoid mud or dirty water being sprayed up your back in wet weather.

pump

It's a good idea to have your own pump so you'll always be able to sort out a flat tyre. If you're out in town and have left your pump at home, a friendly cyclist is sure to come to your aid soon enough. Or, walk to the nearest bike shop. It's surprising how many there are once you start looking!



Tip

There are a couple of types of bike valves. Most pumps will adjust to fit both or you can buy an adaptor.



what to wear?

For the majority of short local cycling trips there is generally no need to wear special clothing, any more than you would for a walk to the shops. In fact, it's possible to cycle in smart clothes, provided they give you enough freedom to pedal.

does the shoe fit?

Shoes that are suitable for walking are also great for cycling.

glow in the dark

If you ride at night or in heavy traffic, it's important to make yourself as visible as possible to other users. A reflective vest or jacket is ideal. Vests are a cheap solution and easy to stow in your bag; and reflective bands for ankles and sleeves are also good to get you seen.

extremely cold extremities?

Wear gloves to keep the cold away, and ear muffs can be handy.





don't let a little rain hold you back

Once people start riding, they generally don't want to stop! People even enjoy riding in the rain – honestly! All you need is a waterproof jacket and trousers plus some reflective gear.






where can I go?

the roads are your oyster!

when you plan your route you should aim for...

-  Quiet roads or cycle paths;
-  Low speed limits;
-  Bus lanes;
-  Parks and open spaces which allow cycling.

...and avoid:

-  Very busy junctions;
-  Large and fast roundabouts;
-  Pavements;
-  Dual carriageways;
-  Lorry-heavy routes.

If any of these are unavoidable, don't let it defeat you, you can always get off and push!

Plan your routes around quiet streets and interesting places - the whole road network is open to you and there are lots of cycle paths and traffic-free routes out there.

Visit www.sustrans.org.uk to find routes near you.

types of path

It is illegal to cycle on a pavement – use roads or cycle paths.

Public Bridleways can be used by walkers, cyclists and horse riders. By law, those on two wheels should give way to other users. Remember the surfaces can be variable and not always suitable for all bikes.

Shared use paths are free of motor traffic and designated for use by walkers, cyclists and sometimes horse riders. These paths generally have good surfaces.

Sustrans' well signed **National Cycle Network**, passes through the centre of every major town in the UK, and 75% of you live within a couple of miles of the network. A third of the routes are traffic-free with paths along disused railways, canal towpaths and forest tracks. Just look out for the blue signs near you.



Tip

If you're thinking about cycling to work, why not use the weekend for a trial run?



You can go anywhere, and what's more, you'll feel the wind in your face, hear the sounds, smell the smells. You become part of where you are. The experience of being outdoors, cycling in the fresh air is richer and more memorable.





tips for motorists

- ⚙️ **When turning left** watch for cyclists coming up on your near side and don't cut them up;
- ⚙️ **Give cyclists a wide berth when overtaking;**
- ⚙️ **At night, dip your headlights** when approaching cyclists;
- ⚙️ **In wet weather,** allow cyclists extra room as surfaces may be slippery.

Cyclists and motorists are equally entitled to use and share the same road space.

tips for cyclists on roads

- ⚙️ **Ride in a position where you can see and be seen;**
- ⚙️ **Make eye contact** with other road users, especially at junctions, then you know they've seen you;
- ⚙️ **Signal** clearly at all times;
- ⚙️ **Follow the Highway Code** – don't jump red lights and don't cycle on the pavement unless it's a designated cycle path;
- ⚙️ **Consider wearing a helmet and bright or reflective clothing,** especially in towns, at night and in bad weather;
- ⚙️ **In wet weather watch your speed** as surfaces may be slippery and it will take you longer to stop.

tips for cyclists on shared use paths

- ⚙️ **Don't go too fast** - it can intimidate others;
- ⚙️ **Use your bell** to let others know you are approaching, but don't assume they can hear or see you;
- ⚙️ **Give way** to others and always be prepared to slow down and stop if necessary;
- ⚙️ **Keep left** or on your side of any dividing line;
- ⚙️ **Be careful** at junctions, bends or entrances.

tips for other path users

- ⚙️ **Keep your dog under control;**
- ⚙️ **Keep to your side** of any dividing line.

where do I find out more?

phone a friend

Most of us know at least one person who already cycles. They'll be an invaluable source of local knowledge on good bike shops, nice quiet streets and bike-friendly paths.

get online

There is a wide variety of information available to cyclists including maps and leaflets – Sustrans provide a series of maps and guides, visit www.sustransshop.co.uk or call **0845 113 00 65**.

Your local council will probably have a series of leaflets of local cycling routes – check their website or visit your local Tourist Information Centre.

free your bike


There are 12,000 miles of National Cycle Network in the UK. To help you enjoy them, Sustrans is offering a free information pack to help you get out and find the Network where you live.

Claim your free pack at www.freeyourbike.org.uk



You are the
world's
ultimate source
of renewable
energy.




sustrans
JOIN THE MOVEMENT

Sustrans is the UK's leading sustainable transport charity.

Our vision is a world in which people choose to travel in ways that benefit their health and the environment. We work on practical, innovative solutions to the transport challenges facing us all. Sustrans is the charity behind the award winning National Cycle Network, Safe Routes to Schools, Bike It, TravelSmart, Active Travel, Connect2 and Liveable Neighbourhoods, all projects that are changing our world one mile at a time.

travelsmart 

To find out more visit or call:

www.sustrans.org.uk 0845 113 00 65

Sustrans, 2 Cathedral Square, Bristol. BS1 5DD

This leaflet was produced in association with Sustrans' TravelSmart with support from the Big Lottery Fund's Well-being Programme.



LOTTERY FUNDED

©Sustrans, March 2008 Registered Charity No. 326550 Photography: Sustrans staff, Nick Turner
Design: www.mammalcreate.co.uk Print: printed on Revive 100 Offset made from
100% post-consumer waste.