

Get going with Sustrans

Cycling through the winter

One of the beauties of cycling is that it can be enjoyed all year round. There's no need to put your bicycle away just because the weather turns cold. With a little advice and some basic equipment you can cycle year round and beat the winter blues by keeping fit and active whilst beating those traffic jams.

If you need any further information on any aspect of riding through winter your local Sustrans team will be able to advise you.

Be visible

It can be hard for motorists to spot cyclists at the best of times, so take extra care when cycling in dark conditions. A helmet and hi-vis are a good idea all year round, but become even more important as the evenings get darker. If you regularly cycle with a rucksack, consider getting a reflective cover.

Light it up

By law, your bike must have a white front light and red rear light (constant or flashing) when cycling between dusk and dawn as well as a rear reflector. To help with visibility, bling your arm, bag, helmet, or clothing with extra lights. In low light murky conditions good lights will make you more visible so you might want to carry some spare batteries with you to cope with the extra demand. Save money and reduce waste by investing in rechargeable batteries.

Way to go

Reconsider your route. Quiet roads that are good to ride on in fair weather are more prone to freezing - particularly early in the morning and bends can be very difficult if icy. Sometimes a gritted busier road is better than an icy quiet road.

Dress for it

Jacket and gloves should be numbers one and two on your checklist with waterproof trousers always coming in handy for bad weather.

Your jacket needs to be water and wind proof, but also breathable and not too thick. It's amazing how quickly you can overheat while cycling, even on the coldest days and you can always add extra layers underneath if necessary. Use a helmet or a hat with a peak to keep rain out of your eyes and carry a bag or pannier to enable you to take off/put on layers as needed.

Keeping your luggage dry

A waterproof pannier bag and/or rucksack cover will protect everything from the elements. You can also line non waterproof bags and carriers with a plastic bag to keep the rain out.



Visibility is Key, so think about your clothing, reflectives, and road positioning



Dress for the occasion and cycling through the winter can still be enjoyable

Tip



Clothing tips

- Make your existing outdoor clothing more cycling specific with hi-vis slap bands, reflective tape on your bike and rucksack cover
- Aim for breathable materials and layers that you can easily remove to keep comfortable
- Check the weather forecast and plan clothing accordingly, you'll soon know what kit you need for what temperature through trial and error

Bike tips

- Keeping your bike clean is the best form of maintenance you can do during the winter. Parts will last longer which will save you money in the long run
- Carry a plastic bag to put on your saddle to keep in dry
- Deflate your tyres slightly for icy conditions but carry a pump to re-inflate if things improve

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Cycling through the winter (continued)

Road conditions

Stick to main road where you can, as ice and snow will clear more quickly here. If you do encounter ice – relax, ride straight and avoid the front brake and sharp turns. Remember you can stop and walk if necessary. Watch out for ice in sheltered areas such as the shaded side of bridges, hedges or bends. Fresh, uncompacted snow can be ridden on with some grip, but thawed refrozen slush provides less grip and makes cycling dangerous.

Check conditions before setting out – do think twice about cycling in very icy weather, particularly if there is a risk of black ice.

If you're riding in wet conditions, get yourself some good mudguards. They'll stop annoying spray backs on yourself and others.

Low winter sun can be temporarily blinding or hide you from approaching or following traffic. Be aware of the sun's position in the sky to ensure other road users can always see you. Sunglasses or a peaked cycle cap under your helmet can help.

Service it.....

Bikes tend to deteriorate more quickly in the winter months with things becoming loose easily in the wet. To make sure your bike is in tip top shape get it serviced at a local bike shop to prevent any nasty surprises during your ride.

....then look after it

Water (particularly mixed with road salt) is really tough on your bike. After riding in bad weather, it's a good idea to give your bike five minutes of TLC to keep things running smoothly. First, give it a general rinse and wipe-down to remove dirt, salt and grit. Pay particular attention to the chain, gears, brakes and wheel rims. When you're done, dry it off with an old towel. Disperse any excess water in moving parts with a spray of WD40, GT85 or something similar then add some bike oil to the chain and gear mechanism.

Get a grip

A good set of tyres will go a long way to prevent unnecessary skidding and they will also lessen the likelihood of you having to fix a puncture in the sleet and rain! Consider changing your tyres for something wider and with more grip. Inflating the tyres a little less than you would in summer will improve traction in slippery conditions.



Investing in a full service by your local bike shop is well worth it

Tip



Riding tips

- Start slowly so that your body, especially your joints and muscles, can warm up properly
- Leave extra time to cycle slower in wet and snowy conditions
- Rain and damp reduces your bike's braking efficiency so always allow more time to stop and don't follow too closely behind vehicles as they made need to suddenly stop
- When riding on settled snow, brake often to clear rims. Braking is up to six times longer when rims are wet
- Avoid puddles that may hide potholes or other road hazards
- Many surfaces are slippery in the wet, like tram tracks, painted lines, metal bridges and road plates - try to avoid these as much as possible or cross them with caution
- Be aware of metal surfaces such as tram tracks and road plates which can be icy when other road surfaces are not
- If you encounter ice, steer straight, don't pedal, and try not to brake as this could cause you to skid and fall

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