

Tykes 'N Bikes

Kids love their bicycles.

However, that affinity does not change the fact that about 250 children are killed and more than 350,000 children go to emergency rooms each year due to bicycle injuries, more than any other sport. Bikes are associated with more childhood injuries than any other consumer product other than automobiles. To keep the joy in biking:

No Helmet, No Bicycle

Bike helmets reduce the risk of serious head injury by 85 percent. According to the Children's National Medical Center, universal use of bicycle helmets by children ages 4 to 15 would prevent between 135 and 155 deaths and between 39,000 and 45,000 head injuries each year.

- The child should participate in the selection of the helmet to assure a proper fit. Do not buy one that a child can "grow into."
- A helmet should have a snug, but comfortable fit. It should have a chin strap and buckles that will stay securely fastened. A properly adjusted helmet covers both the front and back areas of the head.
- All helmets manufactured or imported for sale must meet a uniform Consumer Product Safety Commission standard. Look for the certification. However, helmets that meet ASTM, ANSI or SNELL standards provide adequate protection.

- Never buy a used helmet. Do not use a helmet that has been dropped, or involved in a collision.

- Don't use markers on helmets.

And keep this in mind: If parents wear helmets when they bicycle, about 98 percent of kids wear them, too. If parents don't wear helmets, the number drops considerably.

Rules To Ride By

- Take a bicycle safety course.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that under



age 8, children should ride with adult supervision and off the street. The decision to allow older children on the street depends on traffic patterns and individual maturity.

- Check your brakes before you get on the bike.
- Ride on the far right and travel with the flow of traffic. It is never safe to ride against traffic.
- Stop at stop signs and red lights, and obey all traffic laws.
- Do not ride two abreast unless you are on a bike path.
- Stop at the end of the driveway to look for cars.
- Be predictable. Don't do anything that would surprise the driver of a car, like swerve or act foolish.
- Signal when making a turn. Let motorists know what you are doing by using proper hand signals.
- Don't ride too close to parked cars. The driver may open his door in your path. Leave at least 3 feet between you and parked cars.
- Avoid broken pavement, loose gravel and leaves.
- Don't ride at night, and in wet weather.
- Don't clown around. Never hitch a ride on a moving vehicle or do stunts or wheelies on a road with cars and trucks.
- Be seen. Wear light colored clothing when you ride, including a brightly colored helmet.

- Put reflectors on the front and rear of the bicycle, on the pedals, and on the wheels.

- Wear close fitting clothing to avoid getting caught in moving parts.
- Never wear headphones because they hinder your ability to hear the traffic around you.

Finding The Right Bicycle

Parents, choose a bicycle that fits the child's size today, not one she will grow into later. The bike should fit the rider's ability and kind of riding. To be sure your child's bike is the right size:

- sitting on the seat with hands on the handlebar, your child must be able to place the balls of both feet on the ground.

- straddling the center bar, he should be able to keep both feet flat on the ground with about 1" clearance between the crotch and the bar.

- when buying a bike with hand brakes, be sure the child can comfortably grasp the brakes and apply sufficient pressure to stop the bike. Under ages 6-7, buy a bike with foot brakes.

- Look for rubber-treated pedals, or metal pedals with serrated rattrap edges. Avoid plastic pedals.
- Don't get a bike with gears for a small child. ■