

# Everyday Biking

*An introduction to practical bicycling  
in Chicagoland*

PRODUCED BY:



ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION  
ALLIANCE



# Let's get rolling!



**You don't have to be a world-class athlete or spend a fortune on the latest bike to become an everyday cyclist. All you need is the desire to make a change and the willingness to persevere through a short and relatively easy learning period.**

“But isn't riding a bike dangerous?” you might ask. Riding a bike, like any physical activity, entails certain risks. By making smart choices about routes, equipment and, most importantly, how you conduct yourself on the road, you can reduce those risks to a manageable level. This publication will help you make good choices.

You don't need to rely on a car to get around; the physical, financial and mental benefits of riding a bike will quickly become evident. All it takes is the will to do it!



## SAVE TIME

- Reduce travel time. Riding five miles in traffic often takes less time than driving the same distance.
- Cut down on your trips to the gym by getting active while getting around.



## GET MOVING

- Burn more than 200 calories while biking at 10 mph for 30 minutes.



## SAVE MONEY

- Hold on to the cash you would normally spend on gas, parking tickets, insurance, car upkeep, fees and transit fares.



## PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT

- Reduce pollution. One third of all carbon emissions come from transportation; biking can play an important role in cutting these emissions.



## TRANSFORM YOUR TRAVEL

- Make getting around a stress reliever rather than a source of stress.

# Get the best bike for you

## CHOOSE A BIKE THAT SUITS YOUR NEEDS

If buying a new bike, you'll want to make sure it fits your lifestyle, your budget and your body. Generally, the best bikes for everyday riding will be road bikes, hybrid bikes and comfort bikes. Here's an overview of each of these categories.

### ROAD



Good for commuting, racing and long road rides

- Great for riding on pavement
- Skinnier tires
- Typically rack- and fender-ready
- Responsive steering

### HYBRID



Good for commuting and transportation

- Sturdy and comfortable
- Wide range of gearing
- Typically rack- and fender-ready
- Upright riding position

### COMFORT



Best for trips under 5 miles or leisurely rides on trails with the family

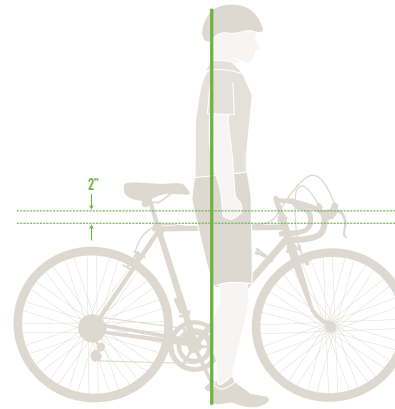
- Wide, smooth tires
- Very upright riding position
- Rack and fenders often included
- May include chain and skirt guard
- Fewer gears
- Slow and heavy, but stable
- Great for riding in dress clothes

## MAKE SURE IT FITS

A well-fitting bike will be more comfortable and enjoyable to ride. Here's how to ensure that your bike fits properly.

### STAND OVER HEIGHT

The most important measurement! This measures the size of the frame in relation to your body. If this measurement is off, nothing you do will make the bike fit you.



While straddling the bike over the highest point of the top tube, there should still be 1-2 inches of space between you and the bike.

### SEAT HEIGHT

Adjust seat height so that your knee bends slightly when the pedal is in the 6 o'clock position. (This will mean having to point your toes to reach the ground while sitting in the saddle).



# Get ready to ride

Make your riding easier and safer by following these tips.

## TURN ON THE LIGHTS

- When the sun sets, use front and rear lights.
- Use a red flashing light in the rear and white light in front. Don't skip the front light: It will make you more visible to oncoming traffic.

## CARRY LOADS ON THE BIKE

- Rear bike racks allow you to carry loads on the bike rather than on you, keeping you cooler and more stable.
- Attach a simple milk crate to the rack to use as a basket or upgrade to a set of panniers (saddle bags).

## STAY CLEAN

- Fenders on the bike reduce the amount of dirt and water thrown up by your tires onto your clothing.
- A chain guard protects your pants from damage and grease from the chain.



# *Arrive in style*

## LOOKING GOOD AND STAYING COMFORTABLE

If your trip is less than 5 miles, you can typically wear your everyday clothes for your ride.

### CLOTHING

- Choose thin natural fabrics and sweat-wicking polyester fabrics for staying cool and looking nice.
- Consider an upright riding bike with a chain guard, skirt guard and fenders to keep your clothes free of debris.
- Use an ankle strap to keep your pants cuff clean.
- Store professional clothes at your office to wear once you arrive.

### HAIR

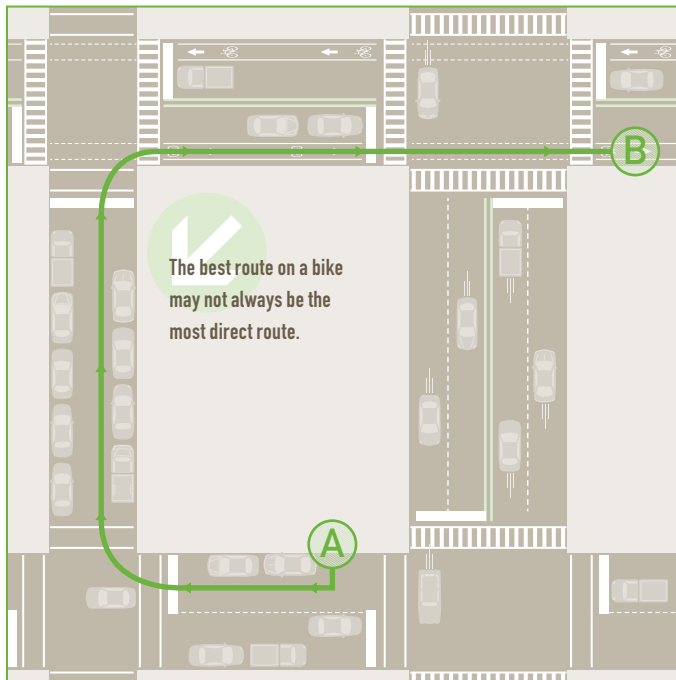
- Consider a simple hairstyle that is less affected by helmets.
- Wear a hat or bandanna under your helmet to reduce marks from helmets and the effects of wind on your hair.



## Choosing a route

The best biking route is often very different from the best driving route. Follow these tips to plan out a safer, more effective route for bicycling.

- Plan your route using a bicycle map of your community, if available.
- Ride on streets with bike lanes and enough room to ride outside of the “door zone” when riding alongside parallel parked cars.
- Consider riding on residential streets when starting out, even if they take you a bit out of the way.
- Cross major streets at traffic signals.



# Conduct an ABC Quick Check before each ride

A quick maintenance check will ensure a safe, enjoyable ride for you.

## AIR

Check the air in your tires. They should be inflated to the maximum-rated PSI listed on the side of the tire. (If you don't have a pressure gauge, they should feel as firm as a fully inflated basketball.)

## BRAKES

Brakes should stop the bike when pushed forward or pulled backward. Brake levers should stop short of reaching the handlebar when pulled.

## CHAIN

The chain should move freely, be free of rust and lightly oiled.



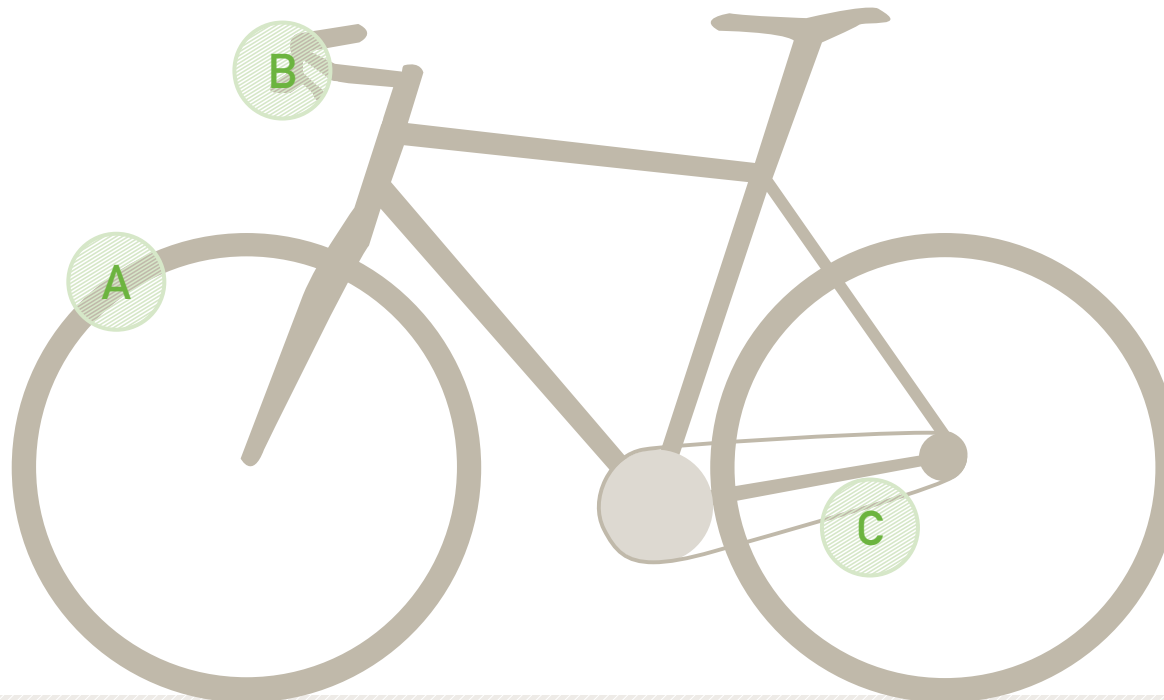
## QUICK RELEASE

Quick releases (the levers that clamp the wheels to the frame) should be engaged and tight. The lever should be curved into the bike and the word "close" will be visible when secured in the proper position. The strength of your whole hand should be required to release the lever.

## CHECK

### THE WHOLE BIKE

Lift the bike an inch or so off the ground and drop it to identify loose parts that may need attention.



# Ride safe, ride smart

Fear of injury keeps many people from riding a bike. Safety is a legitimate concern, but one that can be mitigated with a few helpful tips.

## RIDE PREDICTABLY AND VISIBLY

By operating your bike according to the basic principles of traffic, motorists can see you more easily and accommodate you.

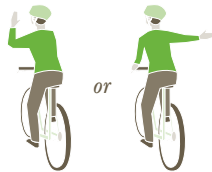
- Ride with traffic, not against it.
- Obey all traffic laws, signs and signals.
- Communicate with drivers and signal your intentions using hand signals.



LEFT TURN



STOP



RIGHT TURN

- Don't ride on the sidewalk (it's illegal in Chicago if you're 12 years or older).
- Ride with confidence and know when to "take the lane." Always scan over your shoulder and signal before moving to the center of the lane.
- Wear bright/reflective clothing and use appropriate lighting and reflectors at night to maximize your visibility. It's the law.
- Consider taking a traffic safety class for bicyclists.



Find a riding companion—someone whose experience can be helpful. Visit Pace Ride Share at [www.pacerideshare.com](http://www.pacerideshare.com) to find other bike commuters in the Chicago area!

## PROTECT YOUR HEAD

Think of a helmet the same way you think of a seat belt. It won't prevent a crash, but it could save your life if you're ever in one. One study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that cyclists wearing helmets in a crash have a 69 percent reduction in their risk of head injury and a 75 percent reduction in their risk of brain injury.

### SIZE

- If the helmet does not cover the top half of your forehead and seems to sit on top of your head, then it's too small.
- If there's a gap between the rim of the helmet and your head or it wobbles on your head, it's too large.

### EYES, EARS AND MOUTH TEST:



**Eyes:** Adjust the helmet so that it sits level and the rim of the helmet (not the sun visor) is just in your field of vision when looking up. There should be about two fingers width between your eyebrows and the rim of the helmet.

**Ears:** Adjust the buckles on the side straps so that they form a "Y" with the junction directly below the earlobes.

**Mouth:** The straps should be buckled under the chin and the tension should be adjusted so that you can feel the helmet pull down when the mouth is opened wide.

## WHAT TO CARRY WHILE RIDING

- Lock
- Transit fare or cash in case you have a mechanical breakdown and need to jump on the bus or train, or catch a cab.
- Identification and emergency contact information (keep emergency phone numbers listed under ICE—In Case of Emergency—on your cell phone).



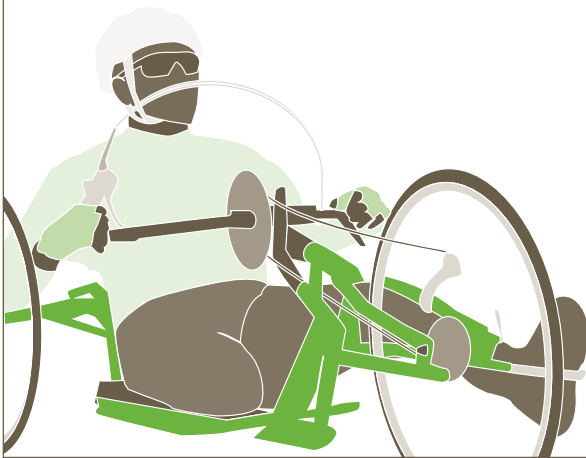
# Riding when you have mobility challenges

If you have limited mobility, you need not miss out on the advantages bicycling has to offer. In many cases, the right equipment will get you rolling.

As riders get older, swinging a leg up over the top tube of a traditional bicycle frame can be difficult. As a solution, switch to a “step through” frame that allows a cyclist to mount the frame without having to raise a leg high.

If you're a rider who experiences discomfort in an upright riding position, consider a recumbent-style frame that puts you in a semi-reclined position. People who have trouble balancing will prefer the stability offered by three-wheeled recumbents.

People with disabilities can choose from a wide range of bikes that adapt to an individual's specific needs. “Hand cycles,” for example, are a popular option for those with limited use of their legs.



For more information about special needs bicycling in Northeast Illinois, contact Project Mobility at [www.projectmobility.org](http://www.projectmobility.org) or the Active Transportation Alliance.

# Riding with children

Parents can take advantage of plenty of good options for transporting children. Whether they're in a bike trailer or a child's seat, children should not ride or be carried on a bike or a trailer until they can sit upright while supporting the weight of their own head and helmet. Check your local laws: In some places, it's illegal to carry a child under 12 months old on your bike.



## BIKE TRAILERS

Bike trailers provide a very stable and secure way to transport kids. They offer a good amount of hauling capacity (some trailers will fit two children side by side). Since trailers are lower to the ground, be sure to use a flag to increase visibility.



## CHILD SEATS

Before riding with your child, practice mounting, dismounting and riding with the seat loaded with extra weight (bricks, etc.) These seats should not be used for kids who weigh more than 40 lbs. (Kids should not be given toys or objects that might be dropped into the bike's wheels.)



## TRAILERCYCLES

A trailercycle, which attaches by a hitch to the back of another bike, is a good option for a child learning to ride. They're also good for longer rides when a child lacks the stamina to keep up. Geared trailercycles allow the child to pedal and contribute to propelling the bike, or she can coast independently.

# Lock your bike securely!

If possible, bring your bike indoors. If storing your bike indoors in a common area, it's best to err on the side of caution and lock it up. It's best to lock the frame and both wheels with a U-lock and a steel cable 5/8" thick or larger.



OK



BEST



- Lock it to a bike rack, parking meter, or other sturdy piece of metal that is secured to the ground.
- Look for places to lock up that have high visibility (thieves like to work in private).
- Many people cover their bike with stickers, tape, etc. to make it less attractive to thieves.

# More security tips

If thieves steal your bike, your chances of seeing it again are slim. That said, you can take action before and after it's stolen to boost the chances of recovery.

## WHEN YOU ACQUIRE YOUR BIKE:

- Register your bike's serial number with your local police.
- Register the bike with a national bike registry: [www.nationalbikeregistry.com/](http://www.nationalbikeregistry.com/)
- Place your contact information on a laminated slip of paper between the tube and tire, in your seat post and handle bars. If the stolen bike ever winds up in a bike shop for repairs, the mechanic may discover the info and contact you.

## IF THE BIKE IS STOLEN:

- Report the theft to the police and provide the serial number, description, etc.
- Register the bike with any local "stolen bike registries." In Chicago, use <http://chicago.stolenbike.org/>.

# Resources

## BIKES ON TRANSIT

Bringing your bike on trains and buses can increase your biking range exponentially.

Visit the Active Transportation Alliance's website for more resources about bikes on transit: [www.activetrans.org/transit/bikes-transit](http://www.activetrans.org/transit/bikes-transit).

Use a multimodal trip planner like [www.goroo.com](http://www.goroo.com) for route suggestions.

## IF YOU EVER EXPERIENCE A CRASH, HERE'S WHAT YOU DO

- Stay put and assess the damage.
- Seek medical attention if you are injured. Never refuse help from paramedics.
- Call the police and file a report.
- Get more information and support by visiting [www.activetrans.org/crashsupport](http://www.activetrans.org/crashsupport) or calling our crash support hotline at 312.869.HELP (4357)

## MORE INFORMATION

Visit [www.activetrans.org](http://www.activetrans.org) to learn more about safe cycling and how to become an engaged member of the Chicagoland cycling community.



ACTIVE  
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*You can help make  
biking safe and easy  
for everyone*

## JOIN THE ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION ALLIANCE

For 25 years, Active Trans has worked with decision makers and community leaders to make walking, biking and transit easier, safer and more inviting.

Become a member today and help us make it better!  
*Members also enjoy these great benefits:*

- The seven-county Chicagoland Bike Map
- Discounts on our events and special deals at more than 100 bike shops and bicycle-friendly businesses
- Up-to-date information and advocacy alerts through our official newsletter



JOIN AT  
[www.activetrans.org/membership](http://www.activetrans.org/membership)

*Chicagoland's voice  
for better biking,  
walking and transit.*



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