Health Beat
HEALTH, MIND & BODY

UPMC Nurse: Summer Bicycle Safety

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Going for a bike ride is a fun yet potentially risky way to exercise outdoors. While it benefits you physically, it’s important to remember to stay cautious as falls and collisions with pedestrians or automobiles have the ability to cause significant injuries. Brush up on the following bicycle safety tips to ensure you’re as safe as possible this summer.

Are You Street Safety Savvy?
When you ride your bike on streets with traffic, you must follow the rules of the road. You must go with the flow of traffic and ride in the same direction as cars and obey all traffic signs and signals. This helps the drivers around you predict what you plan to do and avoid causing an accident. If you act hesitantly, it can fluster the drivers around you, causing confusion and a possible collision. While riding your bicycle you will need to keep pedestrians in mind in addition to motorists. Pedestrians still have the right-of-way and bicyclists should yield to them if needed, just as car drivers would. If you need to pass anyone, slow down, announce which side you will be passing them, and use a bell.

Just like driving, it’s imperative to stay alert and cautious of distractions on roadways. Look out for hazards like potholes, gravel, or other things that might make you fall off your bicycle. You can also stay alert by not wearing headphones and listening for traffic.

Ensure that your children of bike-riding age also have a sense of street safety before allowing them to venture out.

Helmets Help Your Head Health
Whatever age you are, wearing a helmet is crucial to safe bike-riding. Helmets reduce risk of head injury by almost 50% and can save lives. When it comes to helmets, the proper fit is key. Use the following tips to ensure that your helmet fits correctly:

• Helmet straps should be tight enough to allow only one finger to fit between your chin and the strap.

• Helmets should not move when you shake your head.

• Make sure the helmet covers your forehead.

• Make sure the V-shaped straps surround your ears.

• Replace helmets that have been worn in an accident. Even if there are no visible signs of damage to the helmet, consider it defective and replace it.

In addition to wearing a helmet, consider wearing reflective or bright clothing to increase your visibility to drivers, pedestrians, and other bicyclists. Also, add reflectors to your bike; a front light and rear red light can also increase visibility.

Take Precautions Before Your Outing
Before leaving for your expedition, have a route planned, check the weather, and inspect your bike.

Checking your route before you begin your ride gives you the knowledge of where there might be heavy traffic or difficult terrain. It is best to avoid traffic altogether or plan to use roads that have a bike lane or dedicated path if possible.

Weather can affect a bike ride and it’s important to plan accordingly. Exposure to the elements can affect how well you can respond to the environment around you as well as increase your risk for a weather-related illness such as dehydration, heat stroke, or frostbite. Check the forecast for the entire day and take the necessary precautions such as carrying extra water and sun protection on hot days or packing extra dry clothes on cold and wet days. Also, consider how the weather will affect motorists and pedestrians as it may increase braking times, decrease visibility, or create other hazards that put everyone at risk.

Once you have a route in mind, you can begin checking your bike’s functionality. First should be a brake check. If you are unable to stop your bike, you could easily lose control and experience harmful consequences. Make sure that the bike you plan to ride is a good match to your size. If the bike is too big or too small, it will be more difficult to keep under control. Make sure that anything on your person that is loose, such as backpack straps or shoelaces, get tucked in so that nothing gets caught in your bike chain or wheels.

Bicycling is a great option to get active this summer by using common sense and caution.

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