

Bicycle Helmet Safety

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Background:

There are approximately 85 million bicycle riders in the US. Each year about 550,000 bicyclists visit the emergency room. Of these visits, about 67,000 involve head injuries. That's about 1 in 8 people with injuries who have a brain injury. Two-thirds of all deaths are from brain injury. Most importantly, 88% of cyclist's brain injuries can be prevented with a helmet. Learning the rules of the road can help avoid many potentially dangerous situations but accidents can happen at any time. Wearing a helmet just makes sense.

The Basics:

Bicycle helmets protect your brain when you fall. Foam inside the helmet crushes once you hit the road. This cushions the blow and helps to protect your brain. The helmet has a plastic shell that allows it to skid on the street so your neck does not get jerked and keeps the foam in place.

How do I pick a helmet?

All helmets you consider should have a sticker inside with the letters CPSC on it. The CPSC sticker means that the helmet meets legal standards for impact performance and strap performance, factors that you can't judge for yourself in the store. All helmets manufactured after 1999 should meet these standards. There are many factors that you can consider yourself in the store. The helmet has a strong strap that will keep the helmet on your head during a crash. Fit and easy adjustment help ensure that the helmet is worn properly. Always try a helmet on in the store to make certain it fits. Most helmets today are pretty comfortable. Vents will help keep your head cool. The outer shell of the helmet should be smooth, hard, round, and slick. This prevents it from snagging which can jerk your neck around and worsen the severity of the impact. If the bicycle is used on the road, having a mount for mirrors and a visor may be important. Be sure the visor is shatterproof and have a breakaway mount. The helmet should be highly visible day and night. White or bright colors, reflective tape, or active lights will enhance visibility. If a driver sees you, they are more likely to avoid hitting you.

How should the helmet fit?

The helmet should be level and low on your head to give you the best protection. The pads should be adjusted so that the helmet touches all the way around the brim. Next, adjust the straps so that the V on the sides meets just below the ear and the chin strap is snug against your chin but not too tight. Now shake your head. Then, push the front edge of the helmet up and back. If the helmet moves more than an inch, shorten the strap in front of the ear and loosen the nape strap behind the ear. These straps should still meet just below your ear. Now grab the back edge and pull up. If the helmet moves more than an inch shorten the nape strap behind the ear. The helmet should be level, solid on your head, and comfortable.

When should I replace my helmet?

Replace after any crash. Some of the protective foam may have been crushed although damage may not be visible. The helmet will be less effective at protecting your head. Replace the buckle if it is cracked or a piece breaks off.

Resources:

Bicycle Helmet Safety Institute., 4611 Seventh Street South, Arlington VA 22204-1419

www.bhsi.org – (703)486-0100

www.bicyclinginfo.org

www.bicyclesafe.com