

Getting started

A beginner's guide to learning to ride, choosing safety equipment and understanding the road rules

What's included in this fact sheet:

- Teaching yourself or someone else to ride
- Learn to ride methods
- Safety checks – a must before every ride
- Building confidence on a bike
- Riding in different conditions
- Other considerations
- Road Rules for Bike Riders in Victoria

Other fact sheets in this series:

- Buying a suitable bike
- Finding places to ride and people to ride with
- Riding with children
- Basic bike maintenance

Teaching yourself or someone else to ride

It's never too late to learn to ride a bike.

Getting ready to ride safely starts with a few simple essentials. You'll need:

- A roadworthy bike that fits you properly (don't try to learn on a bike that is too big or small). Choose a bike that fits you, with easy reach to the handlebars and brakes, and adjust the seat for comfort and stability. See the **Buying a suitable bike** and **Basic bike maintenance** fact sheets for additional information.
- By law, you must wear an approved, correctly fitting bicycle helmet. For up-to-date information, visit the Transport Victoria website. [Transport Victoria website](#).
- Clothing that is safe (not going to get caught in the gears or wheels) and can be seen easily. You may also consider a wind-proof/water-proof jacket.
- A safe, open space away from traffic and pedestrians—ideally a gentle grassy slope or a sealed shared path with plenty of room.

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- Lesson plans include step-by-step activities, teaching tips and skill progressions that can be adapted for parents, carers and other adults supporting new riders. [Bike Ed – units of work](#)

When you have some skill and want to ride more you will need:

- **Lights** – when riding in low light conditions, you must have a white front light and a rear red light, steady or flashing, that can be seen from 200 metres. A rear red reflector is also required. Even during the day, flashing lights keep you more visible.
- **A bell** – this is a legal requirement and a handy way to let people know you're approaching.
- **A lock** – keep your bike secure when you're not riding it.
- **A pump** – have one at home or carry one on the bike to keep your tyres inflated.

Relax and take your time -Whether you're learning yourself or teaching someone else, be patient and encouraging. Everyone learns at their own pace. Staying relaxed is key to learning to balance, so take your time, stay positive and take breaks before you become too tired or frustrated.

Learn to ride methods

Balance bike method

This is an effective step-by-step method for all beginning riders.

You can turn any bike into a "balance bike" by lowering the seat so the rider can sit with their feet flat on the ground. If you can do so safely, you can also remove the pedals, but this is optional.

The balance bike method works best on a gentle slope. A park with a mown grassy hill, a quiet footpath, or a bike path is ideal. The slope should be gentle and level off so the bike does not go too fast. As the bike slows, the rider can start pedalling.

How to find your balance

1. Walk your bike to a place that you can coast gently downhill for around 10–15 metres.

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2. Sit on the bike with both feet on the ground, facing downhill.
 - Hold the handbrakes on.
 - Look ahead to where you are going.
 - Relax your upper body.
3. Release the brakes and allow the bike to move forward.
 - Push the bike forward with your feet if you need to.
 - Use your feet to stop the bike tipping sideways.
4. Repeat rolling down the slope a few times. Try coasting with your feet off the ground for as long as you can – you'll begin to feel yourself starting to balance.
 - Use the brakes (not your feet) to stop.
5. Once you can roll without putting your foot down for 10–15 metres, it's time to use pedals.

Scooling method

An alternative to the balance bike method is to use the bike as a scooter.

1. Stand straddling the bike with one foot on the pedal.
2. Lean forward so you are leaning on your hands as they hold the handlebars (imagine there is no seat).
3. Use your second foot to scoot the bike forward (as you would a skateboard), repeating as often as possible to maintain momentum.
4. When you have enough momentum, lift your second foot off the ground and coast for as long as you can.
5. Try sitting down as you're coasting. Lift your second foot onto the pedal and, when you're ready, start turning the pedals. Now you're riding!

Tips to make it easier:

- Have your scooting foot clear of the pedal – you'll need to stand slightly to one side.
- Look ahead – including while you lift your foot onto the second pedal.
- Keep your upper body straight – in particular, keep your hips forward.

Once you can balance and pedal on the bike, try a stationary start.

Starting on the flat – the power position

1. Straddle the bike, standing or sitting on the seat. Hold the handbrakes on.

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2. Using the top of your foot, push one pedal backwards until it is in the '2 o'clock' position – also known as 'power position'.
3. Release the brakes and push firmly on the pedal, looking ahead to where you're going. This should give you enough momentum to keep going straight as you find the second pedal.
4. Lift your second foot onto the pedal and keep pedalling.

As you become comfortable, raise your seat incrementally so that you are not as cramped and can pedal more efficiently.

Braking

Use your brakes – not your feet – to slow or stop the bike.

To stop, squeeze both brake levers firmly and smoothly.

Steering – keep looking ahead

It's very normal to wobble when you first start. The key is to look ahead to where you're going.

With practice, you can steer a bike through a very narrow space. This is useful to avoid other people or obstacles. Useful learning activities can be found in the [Bike Ed – units of work](#)

Practice riding in a straight line – and staying straight when you do a 'head check' to see what's behind you, or when taking a hand off the handlebars to signal.

Changing gears

Practise changing gears on a quiet path or local street so that using gears becomes automatic. With practice, you'll be able to keep a constant pedalling speed in different situations, which helps you ride with better control.

Safety checks – a must before every ride

Check your bike is ready to ride

Before you ride off, take a minute to check it's safe to ride with an ABCD+ check.

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There are many videos showing how to do a quick check over to make sure your bike is ready to ride. Here is [an example](#)

For more information, see the **Basic bike maintenance** fact sheet.

Check your helmet

You must wear a helmet, and it must:

- Not be damaged
- Fit firmly, flatly and comfortably on your head – the gap between your eyebrows and helmet should be no more than two fingers wide and the rim of the helmet should sit just above your eyebrows
- Have straps around your chin that are firm, not slack, and the straps make a 'v' just under your ears
- Have a label showing it meets any of the approved safety standards.

To find the right helmet size for a child, measure around their head just above the eyes and ears. Choose a helmet that fits this measurement

Helmets can wear out over time. Replace your helmet every 5 years, or straight away if it is damaged or has been in a crash.

Exceptions apply for some people due to medical or religious reasons. [Bike helmet rules – Transport Victoria](#)

Approved safety standards

- Victorian laws allow you to use bicycle helmets that meet any of the following safety standards:
- Australian/New Zealand Standard AS/NZS 2063:2008 Bicycle helmets,
- Australian New Zealand Standard AS/NZS 2063:2020 Helmets for use on bicycles and wheeled recreational devices
- Australian/New Zealand Standard AS/NZS 2063:1996 Pedal cycle helmets (to be phased out on 03 April 2026)
- European Standard EN 1078:2012+A1:2012 Helmets for pedal cyclists and for users of skateboards and roller skates

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- U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission standard US CPSC 16 C.F.R. Part 1203 Safety Standard for Bicycle Helmet
- American Society for Testing and Materials Standard ASTM F1447-18 Standard Specification for Helmets Used in Recreational Bicycling or Roller Skating
- Snell Standard B-95, 1995 Bicycle Helmet Standard, 1998 revision, Standard for Protective Headgear for Use in Bicycling.
- When buying a bicycle helmet, it is important to check it has a label on it showing it meets one of these standards.

Building confidence on the bike

Take it easy

If you're starting to ride for the first time, or returning to the bike after a long break, ride in your comfort zone to begin with: don't overdo it. Start with shorter rides and, if you want to ride longer distances, build up gradually to let your muscles adjust.

Spend some time on quiet paths getting used to being on the bike. Practise riding with good control before you venture to busier areas.

Brakes – get used to using them

Your right brake lever controls the front brake; your left lever controls the rear brake. Get into the habit of squeezing both brake levers together to stop.

The front brake has more stopping power, but the back brake is useful to control your speed. Although it's best to use both brakes together to stop, you can slow down using the back brake by itself.

Gears – use them to make your ride easier

If your bike has gears, practise changing them, so you get to know which gears make it easier and harder to pedal.

Being in a low (easy to pedal) gear when you start off makes it easier to start smoothly and accelerate.

Get into the habit of changing into a lower gear before you come to a stop so that it is easy to get started again.

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Change gears regularly so you turn the pedals at about the same rate all the time. Change into a lower (easier) gear when you are going up hills, and a higher gear as you ride down.

Be aware of what's around you

Knowing what's ahead and behind you helps you plan where you need to go and respond to your surroundings in plenty of time.

- Listen out, look ahead and scan around you so you are ready to react if you need to – for example, slowing down for a car backing out of a driveway, a dog off-leash or a person crossing a path. Anticipate what might happen around you.
- Know what's behind you – always check behind before you change direction on paths and streets to make sure you're not moving into the path of another bike rider or a car.
- Scan the surface you're riding towards in case there is something you need to avoid, like loose gravel or a pothole.

Be predictable, be seen and communicate

Ride in a way that helps other people know what you are going to do. This makes it easier for them to give you space and helps keep everyone safe.

When riding:

- Keep left on shared paths unless you are passing someone. Ride at a steady speed and move off the path if you need to stop. Use your bell or call out when preparing to pass others on the path.
- On roads, ride in a straight line about 1 metre away from the kerb or parked cars. This helps drivers see you and gives you more space. Do not weave between parked cars or make sudden changes in direction.
- Help others see you. Use bike lights at night and in low-light conditions. Flashing lights can also help you be seen during the day, especially in wet weather. Wearing bright or light-coloured clothing can also make you easier to see. Further information in an [article from Bicycle Network](#)
- Let others know when you are going to stop, turn or pass. Give people enough time to react.

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- Use hand signals when turning. Hold your arm out for a few seconds to show what you are doing.
- Use your bell or call out "passing" or "coming through" when passing people on shared paths. You can call out "stopping" to warn other riders behind you.
- Make eye contact with drivers when needed. This helps you know they have seen you and understand what you are doing.

Riding in different conditions

The basic principles of good riding, to apply every time you ride – be in control, be aware, be predictable, communicate and be visible, but here are some additional tips for riding in different conditions.

At night

- Do not ride at night without lights. They are required by law and help you stay safe. Be seen at night – Transport Vic
- Reflective clothing and a reflective ankle band really helps you to be seen easily at night as well.

Rain

Wet roads and paths can be slippery and you may take longer to stop.

- Ride cautiously and slow down to give yourself more stopping time.
- Dull conditions reduce visibility, so turn your lights on.
- Mudguards on your bike will keep you (and your bike) cleaner and drier. If you are on the street be aware of water splashing up when cars drive past.
- Take care around tram stops, they can be slippery and you can get caught in them, so always cross them at an angle.

Hot weather

- Carry and drink plenty of water on longer rides.



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- Be sun smart with your clothing and sunscreen.
- Wear a helmet with a visor to help shade your face.

Unsealed paths

- Avoid hard or sudden braking and turn with care when riding on gravel and other loose surfaces as your bike has less traction. Ease your brakes on and off and on again to slow down.
- Avoid using 'goat tracks' during summer in areas where bindii (pronounced bindi-eye; *Tribulus terrestris*) grows. The thorns puncture tyres easily and can be frustrating to remove.
- If you're heading out on off-road trails or other isolated areas by yourself, let somebody know where you're going and when you'll be back.

On-street skills – riding in traffic

Tips for riding on the road:

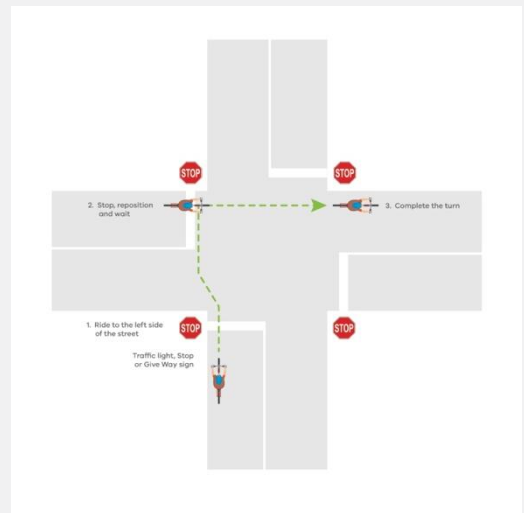
- **Keep out of the 'door zone'** – Ride a metre out from parked cars to avoid the risk of somebody opening a car door in your path. Looking ahead for signs of people in cars also helps you to anticipate opening doors.
- **Crossing intersections** – if you don't feel confident to cross a busier road or intersection you can always get off your bike and cross as a pedestrian.
- **Waiting at intersections** – If you can do so safely, move to the front of the traffic queue to wait at an intersection – you are more visible here. **Never** pass trucks to get to the front though. Wait behind them (see the 'Large vehicle' section below).

Where there are multiple-lanes and a dedicated left turn lane, wait to the right of left-turning traffic if you are going straight at the intersection, unless signed otherwise.

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- **Use a hook turn to turn right** – Bikes may perform a hook turn (turn right from the left side of the road) at any intersection unless a sign prohibits it. This is often a safer way to turn right. Watch this [video from RACV](#) on how to make a hook turn.
- **'Taking a lane'**: In low-speed environments, it can be safest to move into the centre of a traffic lane ('take the lane') if it is too narrow for cars to pass safely, or when you are preparing to turn right or move through a roundabout. First check behind you to make sure it's safe to move across, and signal your intention.



Large vehicles – watch for blind spots

Trucks and buses – even large utes – have really big blind spots. A driver is unable to see some areas at the front, along the side and behind their vehicle, even when using their side mirrors.

Never pass large vehicles on the left or stand next to them at intersections. The safe option is to stay back, especially when a large vehicle is turning left. Some large vehicles tow trailers so can be extra-long too. [Truck Blind Spots And Bicycles – Transport Victoria](#)



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Other considerations

Parking and locking your bike

If you need to leave your bike at your destination, you'll want to make sure it's safe and secure. Here are some tips for locking your bike:

- Secure your bike frame (not just the wheel) to a solid object using a decent lock. A D-lock (named for its shape) is most secure.
- Lock to a bike parking hoop if there is one. If not, find a pole or railing to secure your bike.
- Park away from walking access areas – don't make your bike a hazard for others.
- Park in a location you feel comfortable to be in, which has good visibility from the street or adjacent buildings, and has people around.
- Some destinations like shopping centres or workplaces may have secure, off-street parking.
- Many train stations in metropolitan Melbourne and some in regional Victoria have Parkiteer secure bike parking cages so you can ride to the station. You need to register and pay an annual access fee to use one.

Bicycle Network has more handy tips on [keeping your bike secure](#).

Transporting your bike by car

If you need to drive to the start of a ride, there are several ways to transport your bike, depending on your vehicle and the number of bikes you are carrying. Common options include placing the bike inside the car (often with the front wheel removed), using a towbar-mounted bike rack, or carrying bikes on roof racks.

If using a bike rack, make sure your vehicle's number plate remains visible. If it is obscured, you will need a bike rack number plate.

For more information about choosing and using bike racks, transporting different types of bikes, see the **Finding Places to Ride and People to Ride with** fact sheet.

Choosing the right bike

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The most important thing when borrowing or buying a bike is choosing one that fits you properly. A bike that is the right size will be safer, more comfortable and easier to ride.

Think about how you plan to use your bike. Consider:

- where you'll ride (roads, paths or trails)
- how far and how often you'll ride
- whether comfort or performance is more important
- if you'll need to carry children or shopping
- whether an e-bike or low gears would make riding easier on hills or with heavier load
- your budget and whether you'll want to add accessories such as racks, baskets or mudguards.

There are many types of bikes, including commuter, road, mountain, hybrid, cargo, e-bikes and folding bikes. Each is designed for different riding styles and has its own advantages and limitations.

For detailed information on choosing the right bike, comparing bike types, and buying new or second-hand, see the **Buying a suitable bike** fact sheet.

Buying a bike

Buying from a bike shop is the best option for most people. Your bike will be assembled by a qualified mechanic, and staff can help you choose the right bike for your needs, budget and size. Before you buy, test ride a few bikes, make sure the bike fits properly, and ask the shop to adjust the seat, handlebars and brake levers. Check that the bike can take accessories such as a rack or basket if you need them, and consider buying essential equipment at the same time, including a helmet, lights, bell, lock and pump.

Department store bikes may require self-assembly and usually come with limited advice on sizing or bike selection. If buying second-hand, choose a bike that fits and, if possible, take someone with bike knowledge to inspect it.

If you're considering an e-bike or cargo bike, some retailers and councils offer lease or hire programs so you can try one before buying.

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For children, choosing the correct size bike is essential for safety and comfort. Avoid buying a bike that is too large, as it is harder to control. As children grow, adjust the seat height where possible before moving to a larger bike. Many experts recommend learning to ride without training wheels. See the AusBike guide [What to consider when buying a bike for your child](#) | AusBike.

For more detailed advice, see the **Buying a suitable bike** fact sheet.

Travelling with young children

Children should only travel in a purpose-designed child seat or trailer once they can support their own head while wearing a helmet (usually from about 12 months of age). Victorian law also requires children in trailers to be under 10 years old and wear a securely fitted helmet, and riders must be at least 16 years old to tow a bike trailer.

When choosing how to carry a child, consider your child's age and size, how the carrier affects the bike's handling, and whether you'll still have space for other items.

For more information about child seats, trailers, cargo bikes, legal requirements and choosing the best option for your family, see the **Buying a suitable bike** and/or **Riding with Children** fact sheet.

Road Rules for Bike Riders in Victoria

Bike riders must follow the road rules. Some rules are the same as for drivers, and some are only for people riding bikes. Rules can change, so check the Transport Victoria website for the latest information.

Before you ride on the road, learn the basic road rules. If you are unsure of the rules,

[Victoria Legal Aid Bike Law booklet](#) is a detailed guide to all bike-related road rules in Victoria, which are summarised below.

You must wear an approved helmet

Find more information about helmets, helmet laws, exemptions, see this fact sheet or [Bike helmet rules – Transport Victoria](#)

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Equipment on your bike

By law, your bike must be fitted with:

- a rear red reflector.
- a bell.
- at least one working brake.

When riding at night and in low light conditions, you must use a front white light and a rear red light (flashing or steady) that can be seen from 200 metres away.

It's also a good idea to use flashing lights during the day, to help other road users see you.

Riding on the footpath

Children aged 12 years and under are allowed to ride on footpaths. People older than this may ride on a footpath if they are riding with a child aged 12 and under.

Adults aged 18 years and over can also ride on the footpath with a young child in a bike seat attached to the bike.

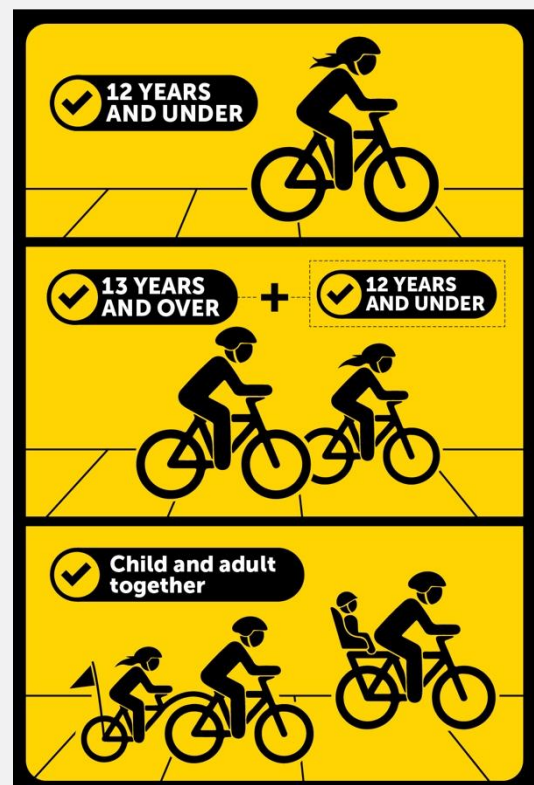
People riding on footpaths must always give way to pedestrians.

Riding on shared paths

A shared path is a space for people walking and riding. This includes people using bikes, scooters, prams, walking dogs, or jogging. Signs and symbols show when a path is shared.

When riding on a shared path:

- Keep left.
- Give way to people walking.



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- Use your bell or call out before passing.
- Leave enough space when passing so everyone feels safe.

Riding on roads

Bicycles can be ridden on roads unless there is a sign prohibiting it (e.g. on metropolitan freeways).

You must ride in a bike lane if there is one unless it's not practical to do so.

Signalling

You must signal before turning right by extending your right arm. It is also good practice to signal if you intend to turn left, if you can do so safely.

You must not overtake a vehicle on the left when it is signalling and already on the arc of turning left. Otherwise, you may overtake a vehicle on the left or the right, if it is safe to do so and you can see approaching traffic clearly.

Riding in a traffic lane

A bike rider is allowed to take up a whole traffic lane if it is safer to do so. In low-speed environments, you may want to 'take the lane' when it is narrow or when you are preparing to turn right or move through a roundabout.

Two bike riders may ride side-by-side on the road, if they are no more than 1.5 metres apart



Using hook turns to turn right

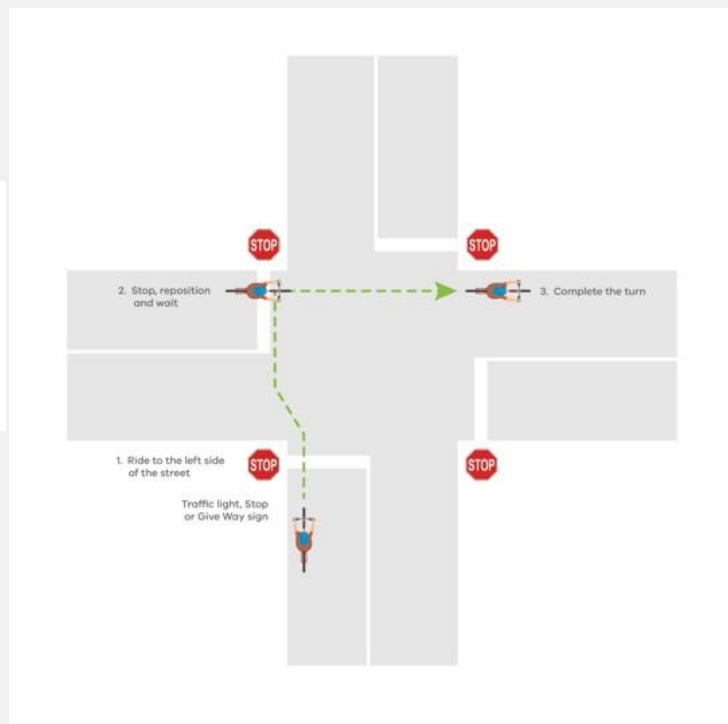
When riding you may use a hook turn to turn right at any intersection where a right turn is allowed. This is often a safer option for bike riders, especially at busy or higher speed intersections.

Watch this [video from RACV](#)

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**BIKE RIDERS
CAN USE A
HOOKTURN
TO TURN RIGHT**
(unless signed otherwise)



Using pedestrian crossings

People walking have priority at pedestrian crossings. If you need to cross while riding, get off your bike and walk it across unless there is a bike crossing with a bike crossing light. When approaching a crossing on the road, stop and give way to people crossing. When turning into a road, give way to pedestrians crossing the side road you are entering.

Mobile phones

Just like in a car, you can use a mobile phone may only if it is 'hands-free'. It must be fixed to your bike or in your pocket or bag. Stop riding and pull over if you need to call or text