

Basic bike maintenance

A simple guide

What's included in this fact sheet:

- Parts of a bike
- Before you ride: ABCD+ check
- Pumping up a tyre
- Adjusting your seat
- Cleaning your bike
- Getting help or doing it yourself

Other fact sheets in this series:

- Getting started
- Buying a suitable bike
- Finding places to ride and people to ride with
- Riding with children

You don't need to know how a bike works to ride one. Learning basic bike maintenance can help keep your bike in good condition. It's also a good idea to have your bike serviced by a professional bicycle mechanic once a year or whenever something doesn't feel right

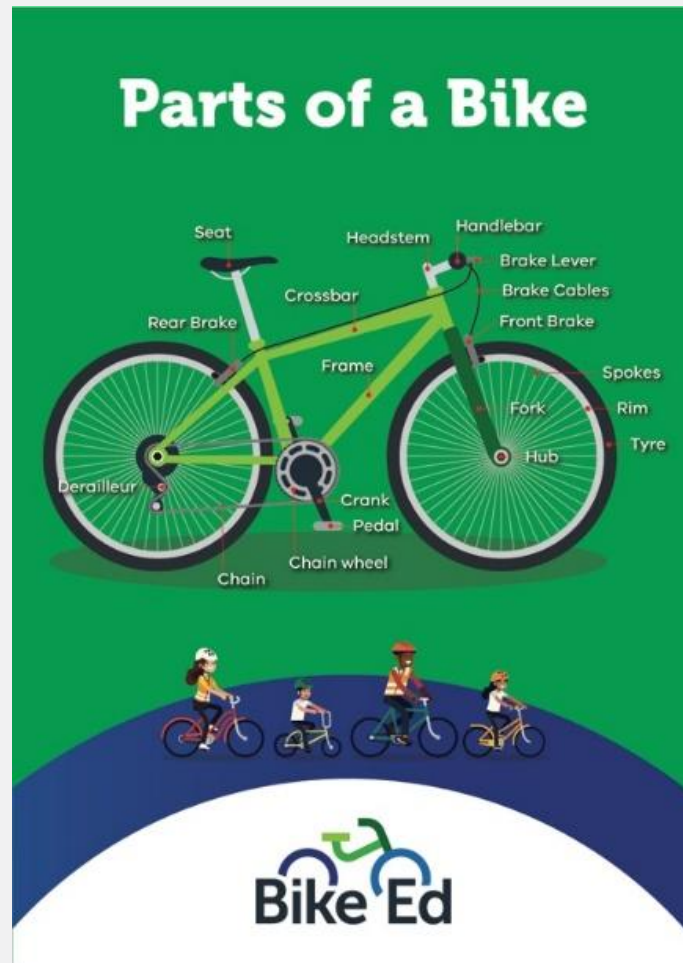
Parts of a bike

The following list describes some of the main bike parts that you may need to check on your bike. If you are concerned about anything on your bike, speak to a bike retailer who can give you advice about whether it needs attention and what the options are.

The following list describes some of the main bike parts that you may need to check on your bike. If you are concerned about anything on your bike, speak to a bike retailer who can give you advice about whether it needs attention and what the options are.

Basic bike maintenance

A simple guide



Seat or saddle

What it does:

- Allows you to sit while you ride

Things to check:

- Make sure the seat is secure (not wobbly) and set at a comfortable height (ideally, your leg is almost straight when the pedal is at its lowest point)
- The seat is usually horizontal, but you can adjust the angle so it slopes slightly up or down if this is more comfortable

Basic bike maintenance

A simple guide

- Different saddles suit different people so if yours is uncomfortable, speak to a bike retailer about what else is available. Saddles may be designed specifically for women or men.

Handlebars

What it does:

- Allow you to steer the bike, brake and change gears
- Allows you to position your bell and mobile phone holder

Things to check:

- Make sure the bars have plugs in the ends so you can't injure yourself from a sharp edge
- Different bikes may have different styles of handlebars – e.g. flat bars, drop bars (like on road racing bikes), or comfort bars (that curve toward the rider)

Head stem

What it does:

- Attaches the handlebars to the frame and allows you to turn left and right

Things to check:

- You should be able to turn easily left and right
- There should be no movement in the headstem when you hold the brakes on and rock the stationary bike back and forth. If it doesn't feel right, have it checked at a bike shop

Brakes

What it does:

- Levers on the handlebars control the brakes to stop the bike. The right brake lever works the front brake; the left lever works the rear brake
- A cable connects the brake lever to the braking mechanism

Things to check:

Basic bike maintenance

A simple guide

- Know what type of brake mechanism is on your bike. Check the wheel turns freely without rubbing when the brakes are off, and that squeezing each brake levers stops the wheel from turning

Cables

What it does:

- Wires connecting the brake and gear levers with the braking and gearing mechanisms are known as cables. They may be protected by plastic cable 'housing' or be housed within the frame

Things to check:

- Cables can stretch and may require adjusting periodically. They may occasionally need to be replaced. Speak to a bike shop if your gears no longer change smoothly or you're pulling your brake levers right back to the handlebars

Forks

What it does:

- The wheels sit between the front and rear forks. The wheel axle bolts on to the ends of the forks (which are known as 'dropouts')
- Mountain bikes often have front forks with shock absorbers (suspension forks) for a smoother ride

Things to check:

- Occasionally forks can get bent if a bike is roughly treated or in a crash. If you think this has happened, take your bike to a bike shop

Tyres and inner tubes

What it does:

- Rubber tyres on the wheels give you traction and control and cushion your ride
- Tyres sit inside the wheel rim. Inner tubes made of thinner rubber sit inside the tyre. These are inflated to fill the tyre with air.

Basic bike maintenance

A simple guide

Things to check:

- Check your tyres are well inflated; they should be firm when squeezed
- Pump them up to the air pressure reading (in PSI) recommended on the side of the tyre
- Keeping them at the correct pressure helps reduce the likelihood of punctures

Valves

What it does:

- The inner tube is inflated through the tube's valve, which pokes through the wheel rim.
- Attach a pump to the valve to pump air into the tube

Things to check:

- Know the type of valves on your bike (there are two main types).
- You'll need to know which valve you need when you buy replacement inner tubes, and when you're inflating the tyre, so you can use the right pump attachment

Bottom bracket

What it does:

- The bracket at the base of the frame attaches the pedals to the bike and allows them to turn

Things to check:

- It should be secure (not loose) and noise-free. If in doubt, have it checked at a bike shop

Basic bike maintenance

A simple guide

Chain

What it does:

- Transfers the power from the pedals to turn the back wheel and propel the bike forward
- The chain is driven around a cog on the pedal crank and a cog on the rear wheel



Things to check:

- Keep it clean and lubricated with bicycle chain lubricant
- If the chain comes off the cogs while you are riding, use a stick or your hands to seat it back on the cogs

Gears

What it does:

- The sizes of the cogs on the rear wheel and the pedal crank affect how hard you need to pedal, and how far you will travel for each pedal stroke
- Gear levers on the handlebars allow you to change how hard you need to pedal (by changing which cog the chain is travelling on)
- Some bikes have internal (hub) gears in the rear wheel, which use a different mechanism

Things to check:

- Check the chain moves smoothly from one cog to the next when you move the gear lever.
- You need to pedal while you move the lever so the chain can move across to the next cog.
- If the chain does not shift smoothly between cogs, have the gears adjusted by a bike mechanic.

Deraileur

What it does:

Basic bike maintenance

A simple guide

- Most geared bikes have this mechanism to shift the chain onto a different cog when you move the gear lever

Things to check:

- If the derailleur gets bent (e.g. if the bike falls over), the gears may not change smoothly. Keep it clean and avoid leaning the bike on it.

Quick release levers

What it does:

- A 'quick release' lever enables you to quickly undo a bolt without tools
- Bikes may have quick release levers at the seat post (for adjusting the seat height) or at the wheel axles (for removing and replacing wheels – e.g. when transporting the bike or fixing a flat tyre)

Things to check:

- Make sure quick release levers are in the closed position before riding. You'll need to press firmly to close the lever, but it should not be difficult to close
- Ensure there is no sideways movement in the wheel – if there is, check the lever is correctly tightened

Hexagonal or 'allen' bolts and 'hex' keys

What it does:

- Often bolts on a bike have a hexagonal-shaped head that uses a 'hex' key or 'allen' key to tighten and loosen the bolt, instead of a spanner
- These keys are easy to use and carry as part of your bike repair kit

Things to check:

- Check if your seat post has a hex key, if it does, buy the right-sized hex key so you can adjust the seat easily yourself

Basic bike maintenance

A simple guide

Before you ride: ABCD+ check

- **A** – Air in your tyres. When you squeeze the tyre, it should be firm. If not, you'll need to pump up your tyres until they feel firm. Check the tyres are in good condition (not too worn).
- **B** – Brakes. Check they're working by pushing your bike forward then squeezing the brake levers. The bike should not be able to move forward any further. Make sure the brake lever doesn't come all the way to the handlebar: there should be at least a finger's width gap when the brake is on.
- **C** – Chain. Check the chain moves easily and is clean. If it is stiff, squeaking or rusty, it may need some chain lubricant, which you can buy it from a bike shop.
- **D** – Drop the bike from a small height (10cm) to check for rattles that indicate a loose part. Tighten if necessary, or check with a bike retailer.
- **+** – Check your lights are fully charged. Make sure the wheels are attached securely (especially if you removed them to transport your bike). Check all quick release levers are in the closed position.

Watch this [video on how to check your bike before your ride](#)

Pumping up a tyre

The recommended air pressure is generally printed on the side of the tyre (you may have to look closely). Some tyres are designed for relatively low pressure (e.g. 35–65 PSI), while others, such as tyres for road bikes, may be up to 120 PSI, which will feel rock hard.

You'll also need to check which type of valves you have. Some bikes have Schraeder (or American) valves, which are the same as car tyres; others have Presta (or French) valves. You need to use the right pump setting for your valves.

Adjusting your seat

To change the height of your seat:

- Undo the seat bolt with a hex key or spanner. Or, if it has a quick release lever, open the lever and wind it anti-clockwise to loosen the bolt.
- Slide the seat up or down to a height that feels comfortable. Tighten it enough so you can test it without the seat dropping when you sit on it. For efficient and comfortable riding, set the seat height so your leg is almost straight when the

Basic bike maintenance

A simple guide

pedal is in the lowest position. If this feels too high, it's fine to set it a bit lower. You might need to adjust it a couple of times before it feels right.

- Once you're happy with the seat height, use a spanner or hex key to tighten the seat bolt fully. If it has a quick release lever, tighten the nut enough that you can close the lever by pressing firmly, but not so much pressure that it's difficult to close.



Cleaning your bike



- Keeping your bike clean will help it run smoothly.
- Wipe your bike down with a damp cloth or hose it down.
- If it's quite dirty use warm soapy water to clean your bike.

Basic bike maintenance

A simple guide

- The chain will collect the most dirt. Wipe it vigorously with a rag. Using an old toothbrush can help to scrub out built up grease and dirt.
- Lubricate the chain after you have cleaned your bike using chain lubricant from a bike shop:
 - Squeeze a drop of lubricant on each link in the chain, slowly spinning the pedals backwards as you do so.
 - Spin the pedals a few times, even changing gears to help the lubricant penetrate the moving parts.
 - Use a rag to wipe of any excess lubricant from the outside of the chain.



Getting help or doing it yourself

Your local bike shop has bicycle mechanics that can help with bike maintenance and repairs. If you want to learn, you can do some basic maintenance and even a few simple repairs yourself and you can find many helpful videos online. If you're unsure, ask a friend who rides a bike for help.