

Cycling in comfort

Once you've chosen the right type of bike for you, it's important to make sure you get one with the correct frame size for your build and height, and then to have it adjusted to suit you.

Generally the height of the frame should suit the length of your legs (so it's comfortable without having to raise the seat too far) and the length between seat post and handlebars should fit your upper body size.

Tip: whilst many bikes are sold as unisex, some manufacturers make versions designed especially for women which take into account the differences in build.

Adjusting your bike to suit you

The seats and handlebars of most bikes can be adjusted in a number of ways to suit the rider or the type of riding. This will help improve your cycling experience and help avoid unnecessary aches and pains.

If you're buying a new bike, your bike shop will make the adjustments for you. If you've had your bike for a while, it's worth checking the following:-

Seat height: this should be set so that your leg is almost straight when you're sitting on the saddle with one heel on the pedal at its lowest point. Note: too low can be hard on the knees, too high can be bad for the lower back.

Seat position: this can be adjusted forwards or backwards - as a general rule, your kneecap should be directly above the mid-point of the pedal when the pedal is at its furthest point forward. The saddle should be level, or tilted forward very slightly for greater comfort.

Handlebars: the reach, angle and height can all be adjusted either with a spanner or Allen key, or by changing the stem. A good cycle shop can help with this. It's worth remembering that a more upright riding position will help you look around more easily, either in traffic or just to enjoy the view.

With a properly sized and adjusted bike you will avoid most discomfort and injury. However, you may need to persist with minor alterations until the bike fits perfectly or visit your bike shop for advice.

Checklist

- ✓ Choose a type of bike that is best suited to the majority of cycling you'll be doing.
- ✓ Try bikes out before you buy.
- ✓ Seek advice from your bike shop on the right size and position.
- ✓ Adjust the seat and handlebar positions to suit you.



photo: J Bewley/Sustrans

Adjusting your bike will help you cycle in comfort

Further information

Any good bike shop should help you choose and adjust your bike.

The following books also have advice:

The Bike Book by Fred Milson (Haynes) ISBN 1-85960-323-8.

Richards 21st Century Bike Book by Richard Ballantine (Pan) ISBN 0-33037717-5

Both available from Sustrans and good bookshops

Useful websites:

CTC (Cyclists' Touring Club) - www.ctc.org.uk

Other leaflets in this series:

Cycling: basic bike maintenance
Cycling: in different conditions
Cycling: security matters
Cycling: sharing your route
Cycling: with children
Cycling: finding your way
Cycling: clothes & accessories

For more copies of this leaflet or others in the series, or for advice on where to cycle, including maps and guides, contact Sustrans on 0117 929 0888 or visit www.sustrans.org.uk

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Cycling
the right bike for you





photo: J Bewley/Sustrans

When buying a new bike, there is a wide range to choose from, so it's worth considering how you intend to use it. Some bikes are designed specifically for certain uses, for example off-road or racing, while others are more adaptable to everyday use. Everyone is built differently so, with older bike as well as new ones, it's worth making a few adjustments to ensure a comfortable fit between rider and machine.

Gaining confidence on a bike is generally a lot easier than learning to drive a car. And once you're in the saddle, it's often quicker and easier to get around by bike. This leaflet is one of a series giving tips to help you get going - and enjoy the freedom and convenience of cycling.

The following summary of bike types and features will help you decide:

Mountain bikes (MTB)

Originally designed for off-road cycling, the wide range of gears, suspension and good manoeuvrability have made these equally popular with urban riders. However, the knobbly tyres make pedalling harder, so it's advisable to fit city tyres ('slicks') if you rarely go off-road. The riding position may not be as comfortable as a hybrid for everyday journeys and items such as mudguards and carrier racks will usually need to be fitted separately.

Hybrids or city bikes.

These have lighter, smoother tyres and a slightly modified MTB frame, with a more upright riding position specially adapted for urban cycling. They are often sold with mudguards and other utility fittings as standard. Hybrids can cope with a wide range of terrain and are a good option for everyday trips. They are less suitable for sports or specialist cycling.

Road or racing bikes.

Drop handlebars, light wheels and thin slick tyres make these the most efficient and fastest bikes for the road. However, they are more prone to punctures and do not cope well with poor surfacing. You may also find the riding position less comfortable than a hybrid for everyday journeys.

Folding bikes

These are specifically aimed at those who want to combine cycling with other modes of transport. They are ideal for bus or train commuters who want to cycle to and from the station. However, their small wheels and often limited range of gears make them only really suitable for relatively short urban journeys (although true enthusiasts have been known to make long distance treks!).

Tip: try friends' bikes or ask your local bike shop for a test ride before you buy.



photo: Carlton Reid



photo: J Bewley/Sustrans

