

# 1: FITTING & EQUIPPING YOUR BIKE

## HOW TO GET A GOOD FIT

Your bike's most important safety feature is you: If you're not comfortable, you're more likely to ride badly and hit something. Getting exactly the right fit depends on many things—including your height, weight, and riding style. You should contact your neighborhood bicycle store to help you find the right fit. Consider these points.

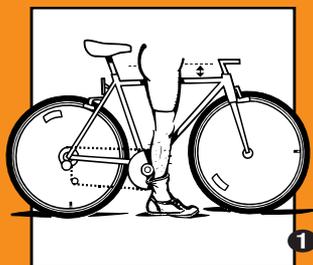
**Frame Size:** If your bike's frame is too tall, too short, or too long, it's very hard to adjust other things to make you comfortable—so you might need a new bike.

**To Check the Height:** On a men's bike, stand with the bike between your legs, just in front of the seat. Measure the space between the top tube and your crotch. ❶ For road or street riding, a one-inch to three-inch space is safest. (Off-road riding might require a bigger space.) For bikes with a slanted top tube, ask your bicycle store's staff to size you.

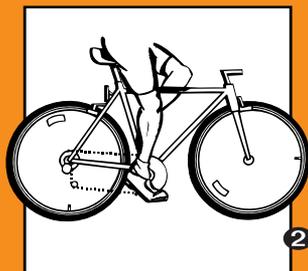
**Frame Length:** If, when you ride, you feel overly stretched or have pain in your neck, shoulders, or back, your frame might be too long. Try moving the seat and handlebars closer together (see page 3). Also, some people—including many women—have torsos shorter than what most bikes are made for. If you're one of them, look into a shorter handlebar stem extension, a taller stem, different handlebars, or a custom bike made for people with smaller torsos.

**Seat Height:** A seat that's too low will strain your knees, while a seat that's too high will make it hard for you to pedal and to put your foot onto the ground. Here are some ways to get the right seat height for most riding:

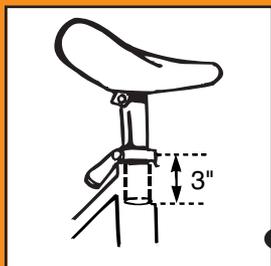
- ▶ Sit on your bike and push one pedal all the way down. ❷ Put the ball of your foot on the pedal. If your seat's high enough, your knee should be slightly bent.
- ▶ If your hips rock from side to side when you pedal, your seat's too high.
- ▶ Don't raise your seat so high that less than three inches of your seat post extends into the frame. ❸ (Most seat posts have a mark showing how high you can raise them.) If your seat post is a foot long but still too short, look into a new bicycle.



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**Handlebars:** After you've set your seat height, set your handlebars so you feel comfortable. Some things to guide you:

- ▶ Start by raising or lowering your handlebars so they block your view of the front axle when you're sitting on your bike with your hands on the handlebars. **4** In this position, your elbows should be slightly bent (not locked).
- ▶ Lower-back pain often means the handlebars are too far away, while upper-arm or shoulder fatigue often means the handlebars are too close to you. Try raising or lowering the handlebars, or moving your seat forward or backward. **5** You can also change to a shorter or longer handlebar stem.
- ▶ Don't raise your handlebars so high that less than two and a half inches of your handlebar stem extends into the frame. **6** (Most stems have a mark showing how high you can raise them.) If you have to raise your handlebars higher than the safe limit, get a longer stem or stem extender.
- ▶ Rotate your handlebars so that they put even pressure across the palms of your hands without bending your wrists in a strange way. **7**

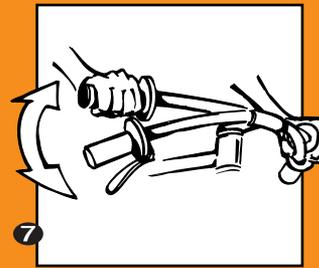
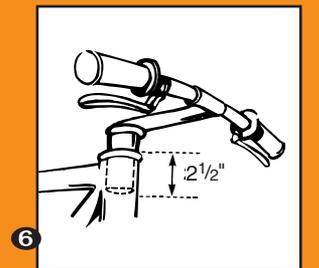
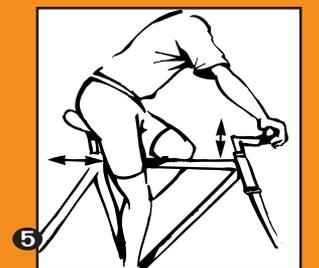
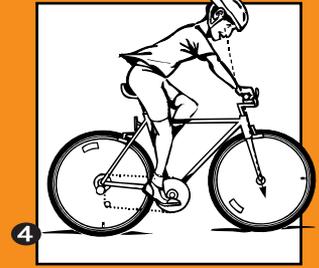
**Seat Tilt:** Last, adjust your seat tilt for comfort: Many cyclists keep their seats level. Many women, however, tilt them nose-down, and many men tilt them nose-up. Try different angles until you find a comfortable one.

**Saddle Soreness:** If you haven't bicycled in a while, expect to be sore at first; chafing or soreness should get better with time. If it doesn't, the first thing to check is the seat adjustment; see "Seat Tilt" above, and "Seat Height" on page 2. If adjustment doesn't help, try alternatives: a gel-filled saddle or saddle pad; a wider or differently-shaped saddle; one with springs; or one made specifically for women. Many bicycle stores will exchange saddles if they're not damaged, so try alternatives until you're comfortable. Also, many cyclists like padded and/or seamless shorts for long rides.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

**For help on fitting a bike:**

See *Urban Bikers' Tricks & Tips*, by Dave Glowacz (Mr. Bike). Available at book stores, by calling 800-888-4741, or on-line at [www.mrbike.com](http://www.mrbike.com).





## BASIC EQUIPMENT

Experienced cyclists have a few simple ideas about equipment that make biking a lot safer—and easier. Here’s what they recommend.

**Helmet:** A must for cycling! See page 9 for details.

**Flat Fixer: To prevent flats:** ❶ Keep your tires at maximum air pressure; they lose a little air every day. Skinnier tires lose air more quickly. Many cyclists use puncture-proof tire liners (like Mr. Tuffy), Kevlar-belted tires, thorn-resistant tubes, or tube sealants. Heavy-set or rough-surface riders should try wider tires. **To fix flats:** Always carry a spare inner tube or a patch kit, and tools to get your tube out. Use tire levers (best) or a screwdriver (not as good); a wrench if you don’t have quick-release hubs; an old sock or rag to cover your hand when you grab your chain; and a hand pump or a quarter to pay for a gas-station pump. (Beware: high-pressure pumps can explode your tire!)

**Carrying Rack:** Make your bike carry your things! ❷ Use bungee cords to tie things to your carrying rack. Attach a milk crate as a carrying case. If you carry things often you should invest in panniers, or the many varieties of bike bags available.

Instead of a rear rack or front basket, you can use a backpack. However, a backpack can strain your shoulders and make balancing harder. And carrying stuff in your arm is unsafe; it’s harder to steer and brake.

**Toe Clips:** Toe clips give your pedaling more power. But if they’re not adjusted right, the clips can lock your feet to your pedals so you can’t put a foot down when you lose your balance. When using toe clips, make sure you can get your feet out of them fast.

**Ankle Strap:** Getting your pants caught in your chain can make you lose control and ruin your pants.

❸ If your bike doesn’t have a chain guard, use a clip or Velcro strap around your pants cuff to keep it from hitting your chain and frame.

**Sunglasses or Goggles:** To protect your eyes from bugs and airborne debris, wear sunglasses or clear goggles, especially with contact lenses. Wrap-around glasses are best. If your glasses steam up in cold weather, apply an anti-fogger. (Some cyclists use a light coating of gel toothpaste.)

**Night and Foul Weather Gear:** If you ride at night or in bad weather you need lights, reflectors, and more. See pages 29-32 for details.

