



# What Every Cyclist Should Know

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## Handling Injuries and Other Problems on the Road

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## Handling injuries

### Handling severe accidents

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**Important!** If a rider has an accident and lands on his or her head, neck, or shoulders, you must consider the possibility of a neck or back injury.

**Never take the rider's helmet off. If the neck is injured, moving it can lacerate the spine and cause paralysis.** Until proven otherwise, assume that such an injury is possible.

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- ***If the person is conscious:*** Ask if the person has neck or back pain, weakness, or loss of limb function or sensation. If so, you should suspect spinal cord injury and have the person stay very still.
- ***If the person is unconscious:*** You have no way to know what injury the person may have suffered, so ***do not move an unconscious person.***

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- ***If an unconscious person regains consciousness before help arrives:*** Keep the person as still and quiet as possible. You may need to be firm. Someone who is in shock or suffering a concussion isn't the best judge of what to do at the moment. Be sympathetic but firm.

If someone may have a neck or back injury, you should ***almost never*** move the person. You could cause irreparable damage to the spinal cord, possibly resulting in ***permanent paralysis***.

If the injured person is in a roadway, divert or stop traffic rather than move the person, and wait for help to arrive.

In the ***rare case*** where you must move the injured rider, get help from as many people as possible. Make every effort to maintain the ***current*** position of the person's back and neck. ***Do not try to straighten someone out.***

### **What to do if one of your riders has an accident and is injured**

#### **Teamwork is critical**

When you're on a ride and an accident occurs, teamwork is critical. One person should take charge of the injured rider

1. ***Stay calm:*** You're no help to the others if you're frantic. Pause, take a deep breath, and survey the situation before you act.
2. ***Divert or stop traffic:*** If the injured rider is in the roadway, have other riders divert or stop traffic until you can determine if the person has a possible neck or back injury. Get all other riders and their bicycles off the road.

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**Important!** If you determine that the person has a possible neck or back injury, continue to divert or hold up traffic until help arrives. ***Do not move the person.***

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3. ***Determine if the person is injured seriously enough to require medical attention:*** The injured rider should get medical attention if he or she:
  - Is bleeding heavily.
  - Has a head injury and lost consciousness, even briefly.
  - Can't remember what happened or is disoriented.
  - Has obvious pain when moving an injured limb.

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- Has trouble opening his or her jaw.

If you don't know much about first aid yourself, ask if anyone in your group does.

If the person has no obvious injuries, you still should pay careful attention to determine if the person is confused or disoriented, which could also indicate a head injury.

4. ***If necessary, send someone for help:*** If there is *any* question about whether professional medical attention is necessary, call 911 immediately. Make sure you can accurately describe your location. Also provide as much information about the injury to 911, so they can respond properly. If there is no cellular phone coverage and you need to send someone to call, make sure the person can accurately describe where you are. If possible, send two riders: one to direct the ambulance to your location (if necessary), and another who can return to the group when 911 has been reached, so you and the others know that help is on the way.

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**Important!** If you have an emergency and there is no cellular phone coverage, remember that bus and cab drivers, utility crews, and construction crews all have radios that they can use to call for help.

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***Care for and reassure the injured rider until help arrives:*** Be as helpful as possible given the situation and the available materials. In particular, keep the person as warm and dry as possible.

Regardless of the rider's condition, act calmly, speak in reassuring tones, and be sure that everyone around you does the same. Ask everyone who isn't helping to stand well back, so the injured rider isn't looking up into a mob of worried or horrified faces. Also, caution the others not to discuss the rider's injuries; no one who is injured wants to hear the words "Wow! Look at all that *blood!*"

***Communicate with the injured rider until help arrives:*** Ask the rider questions to determine their mental status, to see if it's been altered by the injury. *Tell them not to nod their head but to respond in words or with their hands.*

- Does your neck or head hurt? (If yes, don't do anything more.)
- Did you black out?
- Do you hurt anywhere?
- Do you know what happened?
- What day is it?

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- Who is the president?

You should note these responses and tell the emergency personnel.

You should state whether the victim:

- Demonstrates change in mental status—loss of consciousness, confusion, irritability, amnesia.
- Throws up.
- Exhibits any other reactions.

5. ***Make sure the person's contact information and helmet get into the ambulance:*** If an injured rider is taken away in an ambulance, be sure the rider's contact information and helmet go along. Someone at the hospital will probably want to examine the helmet to determine the likelihood of head injuries. Ideally, you'll get the ambulance crew to take the rider's bike, too, so you don't need to worry about it.

**Important!** Be sure you know the rider's name and contact information, so you can call later to check on his or her condition, send a get-well card, return the rider's bike, and file an Accident Report with the Club Treasurer.

### Other concerns in the event of a severe accident

In addition to taking care of the injured rider, you need to be concerned about the other riders and about the injured rider's bike and gear:

- ***Continuing the ride:*** In some cases, you may need to continue the ride before the injured rider has recovered enough to start riding again or before the ambulance has arrived. For example, if it's evening and you're running out of daylight, you'll need to get the other riders back to the starting point.

You shouldn't leave the injured rider alone unless he or she is clearly all right and has a way to get back to the starting point or back home. If the other riders can find their way back to the starting point, you and someone who knows first aid should stay with the injured rider.

Otherwise, you should ask for volunteers to stay, again including someone who knows first aid.

- ***What to do with the injured rider's bike and gear:*** If you need to leave the rider's bike where it is, lock it up and take all of the removable gear with you (bike bags, headlights, and so on). Return for the bike as soon as possible (preferably before nightfall), and let the rider know that you have it. Alternatively, you may be able to leave the bike at a nearby fire station or bike shop, or at the home of one of the local residents.

### Hypothermia

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If you're riding in cold or wet weather, keep an eye on all of your riders to ensure that no one is suffering from hypothermia. Mild hypothermia is characterized by shivering, and can be treated by getting the person out of the cold and into dry clothes. If there's nowhere to get out of the cold, try sharing body heat. More severe cases are characterized by confusion and lack of coordination; in this case you need to get the person to medical care.

### Heat exhaustion and heat stroke

Heat exhaustion and heat stroke can be caused by riding in hot weather or by dressing inappropriately when riding in cooler weather. As a cyclist, you need to dress so you can dissipate heat and perspiration. In addition, you need to drink plenty of fluids, so you don't become dehydrated.

*Heat exhaustion* is characterized by pale, clammy skin, profuse perspiration, and extreme tiredness or weakness. The person may have a headache and may vomit. With heat exhaustion, the person's body temperature is approximately normal.

The treatment for heat exhaustion is rest. If the person is alert, offer oral fluids, preferably water or sports drinks. Don't give the person coffee, tea, or alcoholic beverages.

*Heat stroke* is far more dangerous. The body's temperature control system has stopped working, so the person doesn't sweat anymore. Body temperature may rise so far that brain damage may result.

The symptoms of heat stroke include hot, red skin; no perspiration; extremely high body temperature; dizziness; nausea; headache; rapid pulse; and confusion, disorientation, or unconsciousness.

Get the person out of the heat immediately, and cool his or her body quickly. Soak the person in cool but not cold water, or pour water over the body. Stop and observe the person for 10 minutes, then cool some more if the person's body temperature is still above 102°.

If the person is alert, offer oral fluids, preferably water or sports drinks. Don't give the person coffee, tea, or alcoholic beverages.

If heat stroke develops, the rider will need medical care, possibly including intravenous fluids.

### Road rash

If one of your riders falls and leaves some skin on the pavement, the person should clean the wound thoroughly, apply some antiseptic cream or ointment, and cover it with clean gauze. If there isn't a nearby source of

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clean water, using water from water bottles is better than not cleaning the wound at all. If the edges of a deep cut won't fit back together or if the wound is in a place where motion will prevent it from healing, the rider should get medical attention as soon as possible. For open cuts or abrasions, the rider should seek medical care if he or she hasn't had a tetanus immunization in the last five years.

### Lacerations

If a wound is gushing blood, apply direct pressure with a jersey or glove. Note that it takes around 10 to 15 minutes for a blood clot to form, so don't keep peeking at it to see if it has done so.

### What to carry in a first-aid kit

If you decide to carry a first-aid kit for the occasional minor injury, here are some suggestions on what to include:

- Large gauze squares for cleaning road rash or as protection from further harm.
- A roll of gauze for covering larger areas of rash.
- Non-adherent sterile pads.
- Antiseptic cream or ointment.
- A roll of tape to secure bandages.
- Band-Aids® for small cuts and blisters.
- Second Skin for open blisters.
- Ibuprofen or Tylenol® to minimize swelling or general minor pain.
- A triangular bandage.
- Antihistamine, in case someone has an allergic reaction.
- Latex gloves.

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**Note:** If you have first-aid training, you may want to add other items to your first-aid kit, for example, Epinephrine®, which is good for severe asthma, as well as for bee stings or any other anaphylactic reaction. This depends on your level of knowledge and your willingness to carry the extra weight.

### Who to notify in the event of an accident

The Release Form includes a line for an emergency contact phone number. If an injured rider is taken to the hospital unconscious, and if the person provided an emergency contact phone number, call that number

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immediately and calmly explain what happened. If the rider is conscious, he or she can decide who to contact and when.

If someone was seriously injured, call, the Club President and the Rides Committee Chairperson as soon as possible.

The Club provides an Accident Report form. You should fill out an Accident Report form and mail it into the Club Treasurer even if the incident didn't require a trip to the hospital.

## Handling other problems

Here are some problems that you may encounter on your rides and some suggestions on how to handle them.

### Riding in the rain

In a light rain, you can probably keep riding, but you need to be especially careful on downhills, wet leaves, railroad tracks, and metal bridge decks.

In a rain that's heavy enough to affect visibility, you should consider stopping *off the road* until the rain slows. However, standing around somewhere while you're wet and cold is a good way to get hypothermia, so you need to weigh the odds of getting run over against the odds of freezing to death.

In a heavy rain, you're probably best off finding a nice, warm bakery where you can glut on chocolate until the weather improves. However, be sure you have the permission of the proprietor, be careful not to inconvenience other customers, and be sure you and your riders all *buy* something. Also, recognize that the weather may not improve before sunset, and that you may have to set off in the rain again.

### Avoiding lightning

If you happen to encounter lightning, use the "Flash-To-Bang" method of measuring lightning distance. This is the amount of time that elapses between when you see the flash and when you hear the thunder. For each five-second count, lightning is one mile away, so at 25 seconds the lightning is five miles away. At a count of 15 seconds (three miles) take immediate defensive action:

- Where possible, find shelter in a building or in a fully enclosed metal



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vehicle such as a car, truck, or van with the windows closed.

- Avoid water.
- Avoid metal objects such as bicycles, electric wires, fences, machinery, railroad tracks, tent poles, and so on.
- Don't stop beneath small open-sided rain shelters or isolated trees.
- Avoid hilltops, open spaces, ditches, and depressions.

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**Important!** If you need to take shelter, make every effort to keep your riders calm. You don't want folks crashing into one another in a mad rush to get away from the lightning.

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If your hair is standing up, you have a tingling sensation, the count between flash and bang is less than five seconds, or lightning is striking nearby, you should:

- Remove all metal objects.
- Crouch down, and put your feet together and your hands on your knees.
- Avoid direct contact with other people.

### Dangerous drivers

If you have trouble with a dangerous driver, get everyone off the road, and wait until the driver goes away. Don't antagonize the driver in any way. In addition, get the vehicle license number and a description of the *driver*, and contact the police. If you can't describe the driver, the owner of the car can simply claim not to have been driving the car at the time of the incident. If someone happens to be carrying a camera, this might be a good time to use it.

### Mechanical problems

If someone has mechanical problems, you can:

- Check with your riders to see if anyone has the parts and the expertise to make the repair.
- If there's a nearby bike shop, car repair shop, or hardware store, you might take the group on a detour. You could also suggest that the rider go alone, and provide instructions on how to rejoin the group later, if possible.
- Suggest calling home or calling a taxi.
- Suggest the bus. Some buses are now equipped with bicycle racks.

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- Send someone back for a car. Some problems are not as severe as they might seem.
- *Broken spokes:* Generally, if you don't have too far to travel, you can just ride with a broken spoke. If you can, remove the parts of the spoke, otherwise tie or tape the broken parts to adjacent spokes. If breaking the spoke also affected the true of the wheel, you may also need to loosen the brakes. Emphasize that the rider should avoid potholes as much as possible.
- *Broken chains:* If someone has a chain tool along, you can simply remove the bad link and put the chain back together. Because the chain will then be shorter, the rider should avoid using the large chainring (in front) or the large gear (in back).
- *A hole in a tire:* If you have a small hole in a tire, you can keep the inner tube from bulging out through the hole by slipping something inside the tire to cover the hole. A dollar bill works fine, and a section cut from an old tire works even better, but it's just a temporary fix. You should replace the tire as soon as you can. If the hole is in the sidewall, take extra care because a sidewall cut can cause the tire to fall off the rim; use this trick just long enough to *slowly* limp home or to a bike shop.

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