

(201) 792 3544

50 Harrison Street Suite 316
Hoboken, NJ 07030

Newsletter

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Bicycling Safely.

Bicycling has become extremely popular in the United States. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention it is estimated that 66.9 million Americans ride bicycles; of that, over 33 million are children. But each year at least 500,000 bicyclists are seen in hospital emergency rooms.

Of course, being concerned parents, we all know the basics of bicycle safety:

Always wear a helmet

Always wear bright neon clothing or reflectors

Check tire pressure and brakes prior to riding

Adjust the seat so that there's 1 to 2 inches between you and the top tube bar and, if riding a mountain bike, 3 to 4 inches

Keep both hands on the handle bars

Ride with traffic following all traffic laws

Avoid riding at night

However, there is more to bicycling safely than those bicycle safety rules.

Learn to Ride Defensively

At the website www.bicyclesafe.com you will find "10 Ways to Not Get Hit". Each collision type is illustrated with pictures and practical tips on how to avoid this type of collision. The fact is that knowing the laws of bicycling will not help you avoid

getting hit by a car.

As this website so aptly states, “Don’t fall for the myth that wearing a helmet is the first and last word in biking safety. In truth, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. It’s better to not get hit. That’s what real bicycle safety is about.”

Yes, a helmet will probably save your life if you get hit by a car, but you can avoid all the pain and injuries if you can avoid the collision all together.

Get a Headlight

This first piece of advice is a law in most states (especially when riding at night), and will only cost you around \$10 to potentially save you or your child’s life. When coming up to an intersection, a bright or flashing light will alert drivers that you’re there which can help you to avoid a driver pulling out in front of you or hitting you as you enter the intersection.

A flashing light is even recommended during the daytime as it will typically catch a driver’s eye and alert them to your presence. Headlamps mounted on your head or helmet are advantageous because you can look at the driver and make sure they see your light since you’re aiming it right at them.

Wave, Honk or Slow Down

If you and a car are approaching an intersection and it looks like the driver doesn’t see you then wave your arm or blow an air horn. You need to get their attention before you end up a new hood ornament. Of course, a safe bet and a perfect example of “defensive riding” is to just slow down so that the motorist is gone before you get there.

Ride Further Left

This may go against the grain because we’re taught to stay in the bike lane, but drivers are looking for other cars in the middle of the road, not bicycles in the bike lane. Riding where a car would

ordinarily be increases the odds of other drivers seeing you. Obviously, most bicyclists are uncomfortable with this idea because they're worried about being hit by the cars behind them. But it makes sense, the car that doesn't see you is going to be more hazardous than the car behind you that can see you clearly.

Stay Off the Sidewalk

Statistically, bicycle crashes with injury are almost twice as likely on sidewalks because motorists are not looking for or expecting to find bicyclists on the sidewalk, especially those riding against traffic.

In other words, every intersection, alleyway, drive-way, frontage road and mall entrance can be an opportunity for you to get hit by an unsuspecting or distracted driver.

This, of course, doesn't include bikeways that are paved and designed for bicycling. These will typically be long, uninterrupted stretches of pavement with the occasional light-controlled intersection.

Never Ride Against Traffic

This is probably a no-brainer, but it still needs to be mentioned. A car making a right hand turn to enter the street from a driveway, parking lot or cross street is looking to the left and expecting traffic to come at them from their left. That driver will not be looking for you, will probably not see you and more than likely will hit you.

Don't Stop in a Blind Spot

Stop behind a car, not right next to them. The car behind you is going to see you but the car that you just approached from behind on the right probably didn't notice you. If you stop in their blind spot then they'll never know you're there.

Assuming that the driver is going to go straight, because they didn't put on their right-turn indicator, is a mistake that a lot of cyclists make. If you stop behind the car an unexpected right turn isn't going to result in you being hit.

Ride Like You're Invisible

The rest of the tips at bicyclesafe.com can best be summed up by this bit of advice: ride your bike like no one can see you. Every move you make – every turn, every lane change, every intersection crossing – should be made like you're invisible and the only way you're going to make it safely is if you avoid the other cars on the road.

Look behind you before turning to make sure that there's no car coming up on your left that might turn right into your path. Look behind you before changing lanes to ensure that there's not another car coming up fast on your left. Don't ever pass a car on the right because they might move right to make a right hand turn and run you off the road. Don't do anything that puts you in the path of a car if you don't know for sure that the driver saw you. As a matter of fact, to err on the side of caution, don't do anything that puts you in the path of a car unless absolutely necessary and you know for sure that the driver saw you.

The Chiropractic Factor

Clearly there's more to bicycle safety than knowing the rules of the road and using the right equipment. Then again teaching your family to ride defensively and making sure to avoid collisions doesn't guarantee that your child isn't going to lose their balance and have their own accident on their bike. When this happens it's important to know what to do.

Even though you pick your child up and dust them off, it still may have resulted in more than just a skinned knee or a scraped elbow; they might have strained their spine, creating nerve interference that could result in a lack of expression of wellness. That's why you should take your child to your Family Wellness Chiropractor after any incident on a bicycle.