**TRAINING INTERNSHIP**

Bicycling has long been recognized as one of the finest forms of exercise. Unlike running, aerobics, Tae-Bo and other fitness fads, cycling is easy on the body because the bicycle supports your body weight so you don't have to. Plus, there's no impact on the body from pedaling.  
  
These advantages make cycling an ideal way to get fit because the risk of injury is practically nil and the chance of success is excellent. Even better, compared with stuffy health clubs or boring jogging tracks, every ride offers adventure. You enjoy overlooks, spot wildlife; conquer climbs, surf tailwinds, getting fit while having the time of your life.  
  
In fact, cycling is such great fun, it's possible to get carried away and ride too far or too hard, too soon. That's probably not a problem if you're just riding for fun. But, if you're pedaling for fitness, it's wiser to build strength gradually and consistently according to a plan. To help, we offer the following 7 guidelines:  
  
**Get A Check-Up**  
Before beginning a fitness program it's best to get checked by your physician to ensure that it's safe for you to begin cycling regularly. Additionally, you can discuss your fitness goal with your doctor for expert feedback. They may surprise you with some excellent training tips!  
  
**Set A Goal**  
The secret to being motivated to train is having something to look forward to. For many riders it's an event such as a summer century (a 60- to 100-mile supported ride) or a mountain-bike festival (being fit means being able to keep up with others and finish rides). But, you might have less lofty goals, such as being able to make it up that long fireroad climb someday without walking. Whatever -- the goal you pick isn't as important as making sure that it's doable. For example, shooting for an Olympic medal is probably a stretch and setting yourself up for failure at the outset. It's more constructive and more motivating to choose goals within your reach. And you can always up the ante as you progress.  
  
**Work Then Rest**The basic principle of exercise is stressing the body a certain amount and then letting it recover. During the recovery phase the body reacts to the work you did and actually gets stronger. And, over time, by gradually increasing the amount and intensity of the work and recovering carefully, you build fitness and improve. Keep this hard/easy principle in mind as you train and always remember that the easy part (rest) is just as important as the work part. Pay attention to how you feel after rides, to gauge your fatigue level and adjust your training accordingly to allow recovery.  
  
**Build Fitness Gradually**To maintain a fitness level, you must ride at least three days a week. And these rides should be based on your ability. If you're just starting to train, they might be conversational pace (an effort that allows you to talk to ride partners) and about an hour long on rolling or flat terrain. Then, to increase your range and ability to maintain a faster pace, you can add another ride to the week and/or increase the intensity (either by riding faster or including hills or hard efforts to increase the workload) of some of the rides. What's important is to add effort gradually. Shoot for about a ten-percent increase per week in distance/time and no more. And, always back off if you feel tired taking an easy day spinning comfortably around a flat loop or resting entirely.  
  
**Track Your Training**Another secret to success is keeping a training diary. Any notebook or electronic file is fine. After each ride, jot down a description, the distance, time, effort level and how you felt that day. You might also want to track your weight and resting heart rate. Once you've accumulated some data, the diary becomes a great tool for figuring out what works and what doesn't. Use it to fine-tune your workouts to achieve your goals. A training log is also a fine motivator. As the pages fill with rides, you'll be proud of your accomplishment and want to keep adding to it.  
  
**Make Time To Ride**If you're a busy professional, the biggest challenge may be finding time to ride. It helps to be flexible, creative and stubborn. Keep in mind that any ride is better than no ride when it comes to achieving your goals and try to get in your planned rides. Responsibilities eating up most of the day? Ride in the pre-dawn hours or evening with a light. If you have a shower at work, consider riding during your lunch break or commuting by bike. You might even be able to form a weekly lunch group ride. Need to watch the kids during the time you set aside to ride? Get your ride in on a trainer in the living room so you can exercise and monitor the kids simultaneously. If you can think like this and are determined to fit your rides in, you'll stick with your plan and succeed.  
  
**Stay Motivated**While everyone feel out of sorts at times, it shouldn't jeopardize your fitness goals. Usually, the hardest part is getting out of the house and starting to ride. One great trick is having a training partner or riding with a group that meets regularly. It's also a great idea to set short-term goals and use them as focal points in your training. For example, you might write a training schedule and use it to set daily goals and remain committed. Another trick is telling yourself beforehand that it's going to be a great ride. Or, try focusing on something positive on the ride such as a bakery you can stop at or a thrilling descent. Keep things fun like this and you'll stay on track and realize your goals.

**Good luck!**

Getting Into Bicycle Racing: Competing

Bicycle racing seems simple to outsiders because it appears that the strongest rider wins. But, it's actually like chess on wheels, where wins come as often from brains as from brawn. This is what makes it such a challenging sport and such a rewarding one when you finally break through and start placing and winning.

To help speed your learning curve, we've put together this article. Keep in mind that you'll improve fastest if you stay positive. Focus on having a good time. Don't put too much pressure on yourself. And, instead of worrying about mistakes, learn from them. Good luck!  
  
**Warming Up**  
[](NULL)Even the pros get butterflies in their stomachs before races. A proper warm-up will help ease anxiety and it's crucial to get your body ready to race.

Your goal is to hurt your legs a little, break a sweat and raise your heart rate so you're breathing hard. To do this, spin easily for 15 minutes, gradually increasing your pace. Then do 3, 3-minute race-pace efforts with 3 minutes of recovery between. Once you're warm, pedal easily to the start.

Note that a trick to ease pre-race anxiety is warming up away from the other racers and the starting area. Find a quiet, peaceful spot to settle your nerves. And, keep in mind that you can do this same warm-up on a trainer right next to your vehicle, if you bring one to races. On the trainer, just listen to music to eliminate any distractions and get focused.

**Bonus Tip:** Don't worry if your legs feel dead or tired while warming up. That's common. And the feeling will go away in the race. Plus, it's better that your legs feel bad during the warm-up than the first time someone attacks.

**The Start**  
The most common racing mistake is riding too hard too early in a race. So, remember that starts are always difficult. Start aggressively and expect to suffer a bit (this is why the warm-up is so important). But, try to start at a pace that's manageable for your legs and lungs, and don't go overly hard. Usually, even races that start super fast will soon settle into a good rhythm you'll find manageable.  
  
[](NULL)In a road race, it's imperative that you stay with the pack. In amateur races, especially criteriums, the first third of the race is often very difficult. Everyone is fresh so everyone wants to go fast. Weather this storm and wait until your competitors show signs of fatigue before you make any moves. Remember that when you're suffering, so are most of the other racers. Be strong and don't give up.   
  
Racing off road you'll probably have chances to pass people. But ride steady and within your limits. Going super hard to get ahead of a few more people will often cost you later in the race. Save your energy for later when it matters the most.

**Bonus Tip:** To get a good start you need to be able to get into your clipless pedals quickly. To perfect this technique, practice getting into them (where it's safe), until you can do it quickly and smoothly every time without looking.

**Basic Tactics**  
[](NULL)A great way to learn good pace is to find riders early in the race that are about your level, and stick with them. If they disappear up the trail or road, find a different group to stick with. Sit in at the back and enjoy the ride. You're sheltered from the wind back there so you can rest and recover.

When you feel good enough, or if the bunch slows, you may want to pick it up and attempt to catch some people ahead. Just remember that it's always best to tuck in behind someone when possible, because you expend up to 30-percent less energy than you would riding alone.

Ride smart climbing and descending, too. If you climb too hard, you'll blow up and lose lots of time. And, speeding downhill when you're tired is dangerous. Don't risk it.

**Bonus Tip:** Here too, practice makes perfect. And a great place to practice riding with others and maintaining the pace is on group training rides. These aren't races but the group riding is very similar and helpful.

**Nutrition**  
You can only store about 90 minutes worth of glycogen, which is what gives you energy, so in races longer than that you must eat to keep going strong. Carry bottles on your bike (or wear a hydration pack), and consume at least 20 ounces of water or sports drink over the course of every 45 minutes.

Drinks with complex and simple carbohydrates keep energy levels elevated and prevent cramping. Try different brands during training (rather than on race day) to determine which ones you like best and which won’t upset your stomach. During warmer races, you'll probably want a slightly higher percentage of water to [](NULL)sports drink to prevent a sticky-sweet overload.

For food, energy gels and chews are great for short, intense races like criteriums, short mountain-bike races and cyclocross races, where you don't want to remove your hands from the bars for very long. Gels are the consistency of cake frosting so they go down fast and taste yummy. Eat one about every 30 minutes.

Road races and endurance mountain races are more difficult to eat for. If your race is under 3.5 hours, you'll probably get by with a combination of gels, sports drinks and energy bars. Remember that energy bars are harder to chew and swallow than gels, so you'll want to eat them during a lull in the action.

You'll also want to drink plenty of water to ensure proper digestion. Typically long, easy climbs and valleys where the pace is moderate are good places to eat. But, keep an eye on your competitors as they may attack while you try to refuel; a frowned-on yet common tactic.

In races over 3.5 hours you'll probably want to eat more "real" food. Popular foods include bananas, fig bars, cashews, pastries, peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches, or whip up your own [gourmet rice cakes](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5UiuqIWGe_s). These calorie-rich goodies are tasty, which ensures you'll eat when your stomach says no but your legs are begging for fuel. Another great way to get calories is to bring a bottle with a high-calorie drink mix that provides large quantities of carbohydrates, protein and, in some cases, nutritional fats.

**Bonus Tip:** Start drinking and eating within the first 30 minutes to train your body to metabolize the calories as you race. Then sip and nibble every 15 minutes. If you wait until you're hungry or thirsty, it's usually too late to absorb the fuel and you’ll begin to weaken and slow. You don't want that.

**Sportsmanship**  
[](NULL)Competition brings out the best in athletes. Unfortunately, it can also bring out the worst. If someone cuts you off or causes you to nearly crash, try not to overreact. Why waste valuable energy arguing? Just shake it off and let your riding do your talking.

Likewise, if a mechanical breakdown knocks you out of the race, don’t lose it and hurl your bike against the closest object. Remember that you're doing this for fun and recreation! Take some deep breaths and accept your bad luck.

If you take stuff like this in stride and show your good sportsmanship, people remember how well you were riding. And if you curse, complain and make excuses, people remember that, too. How would you like to be remembered?

**Bonus Tip:** Experienced racers are usually quiet, confident competitors. Their calmness is a result of realizing that the person who wastes the least energy during the race has the best shot at winning.

**Recovery**  
After you cross the finish line, don't spend too much time standing around. To speed recovery, pedal around the race area for about 20 minutes to lower your heart rate gradually. If it’s chilly, put on warm clothes first.

It’s also very important to replenish lost fluids and nutrients soon after finishing. [](NULL)Riding hard causes micro tears in your muscles and connective tissue. In order to repair this damage, and to strengthen your body for the next workout, it's important to take in nutrition in the 30 minutes following your ride.

This is when your muscles are most capable of taking in nutrition and using it to recover and get stronger. A recovery shake that’s high in protein and carbohydrates is ideal because your body absorbs the nutrients faster than it would from solid food. Give yourself 10 to 30 minutes after your shake and enjoy your favorite post-race meal.

**Bonus Tip:** Since you usually have to drive to races, it's smart to bring a small cooler with your post-race meal inside. A gallon jug of water and a towel will make it easy to clean up too. And, don't forget the toilet paper, just in case.

What's left? Well, now that you're fed and cleaned up, you're ready for your first podium appearance. Congratulations!

Getting Into Bicycle Racing: Preparation

[](NULL)Nothing's better than spinning along smooth pavement and cruising sweet singletrack with good friends. But, have you ever noticed when cresting a hill, or approaching a city-limits sign, that you have an irresistible urge to be the first one to get there? That you can't help but pick up the pace? And that, as your friends respond, a burst of adrenaline feeds your need to lead? That’s racing!

That intensity and excitement of pushing just a bit harder is what bicycle racing is all about. To help you get off on the right pedal in this great sport, we've put together this guide. Who knows? It might help you become the next Lance Armstrong?  
  
**Tune up Your Bicycle**  
For safe and efficient racing, your bicycle must be in excellent working order. It should shift and brake perfectly. The tires should be new or nearly new. And, all the parts should be tight, properly adjusted and lubricated. [](NULL)This is important because racing tests bikes and you don't want to get knocked out of a race due to a mechanical. If you’re not handy with bike repair, bring your rig to our shop for a tune-up. Let us know you’re entering your first race and we’ll get your machine ready to rock! Or, if your bike's really old and dilapidated, treat yourself to a new one. We've got a great selection of race-ready rigs with all the latest features. Come in for a test ride to feel the difference these thoroughbreds make.

**Tune Up Your Body**  
Now that your bike's dialed, it’s time to tune up the motor. If you’ve been sitting on the couch all winter watching reruns, chances are you’re not ready to race. Put down the potato chips and hop on your bike! Get at least four weeks of riding in your legs before entering your first race. You don't need to ride every day. But you want some miles in your legs in order to make your first race experience a pleasant one. If you’re racing in a beginner class, chances are the event won’t exceed two hours. But, make sure that at least one ride a week is 10% longer than race distance, so you’ll feel confident about finishing.

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| **Type of Racing** | **Website** |
| Road/Mountain/ Track/Cyclocross/ BMX | [USA Cycling](http://www.usacycling.org/) |
| Road/Mountain | [Prerace](http://www.prerace.com/) |
| Mountain | [MTB Race News](http://www2.mtbracenews.com/calendar/) |
| Endurance Mountain | [Ride 424](http://www.ride424.com/calendar.php) |
| Road/Mountain (Colorado) | [American Cycling](http://www.americancycling.org/) |
| Road (Midwest) | [AM Bike Race](http://www.ambikerace.com/) |
| More | [Sportsbase](http://sportsbaseonline.com/), [BikeReg](http://www.bikereg.com/" \t "_blank) |

**Find Races**  
We can tell you about the popular events in our area. If we're closed, your best source of race information is online. We've listed a number of helpful resources here. You may also find listings in your local newspapers or the free regional magazine, Competitor, which has an events calendar organized by location to make it easy to find nearby events. Another way to find out about races is to ask the people you ride with. If they've been competing for a while, they'll have a feel for which races are the most fun and will know when they're coming up.

**Licensed To Race**  
Most races are governed by organizations such as USA Cycling. To enter these races you're required to purchase a racing license. You should be able to buy a one-day license at most events. However, if you plan to race regularly, you should probably purchase an annual license, which costs less per race, permits you to race year-round and supports the sport of cycling. There are also races that aren’t sanctioned and may or may not require a license. Whatever the type of race, registering early helps you avoid late fees and the long registration lines the day of the race.  
  
[](NULL)**Ride With Others**  
If you haven't ridden in a group, you should practice before entering a race because pedaling in close proximity can be unnerving. In fact, it's not unusual in races to get bumped. Rubbing is racing! If you're used to it, it won't bother you. If you're not, you might crash or cause one. The best way to learn is to join a friendly group ride. Be sure to find the group leader before the ride starts and tell him that you're there to learn. He'll probably ride at the back with you and explain how to ride safely.

A key skill is being able to ride a straight line, which comes with relaxation and confidence. It's also best to never overlap someone's rear wheel with your front wheel because, if they have to swerve to avoid a hole or rock, they'll bump your wheel and knock you off. With a little practice, a good teacher and by carefully observing how experienced riders do it, you can learn to safely ride in groups, which will help a lot in races.

**Learn To Fix A Flat**  
Every cyclist should know how to repair a flat tire because it's the most likely breakdown. Flat halfway into a 60-mile road race, and you're in for a long haul home if you can't repair the tire. Also, some mountain bike [](http://blackmountainbicycles.com/articles/seImagePopup('/images/library/site/raceprep_flat450_09_p.jpg','Be%20prepared%20to%20repair%20your%20own%20flat%20tires.','450','445',event);undefined)races forbid competitors from accepting outside mechanical support. This means that if you get a flat, you'll have to fix it on your own or risk disqualification. We can supply what you need to do the job and even show you how.

**Pre-ride The Course**  
Once you've prepared yourself and your bike to race and you've picked a race or two to enter, it's best to pre-ride the course(s). Usually, you do this a couple days before the event when there's no pressure and when others aren't racing on the course (as is the case on race day). Note the tough sections such as hills, tight corners in criteriums and obstacles on mountain-bike courses. You might want to ride challenging sections a few times to get a feel for them.

Just get in your pre-ride a few days before the race. And be sure to ride easy to save energy for the big day. Pre-riding also gives you a chance to gauge the fitness and skill you’ll need to finish the race. If you can't pre-ride, talk to fellow competitors who've raced the event and ask about the length, duration and unique characteristics of the course. Knowing what a race is going to throw your way will give you confidence and peace of mind prior to the start.

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| **Sample Race-Day Checklist** | | |
| **Bicycle** | Cycling Eyewear | Basic Bike Tools |
| **Bicycle Shoes** | Spare Cycling Clothing | Pre-race Nutrition |
| **Helmet** | Spare Wheels | Post-race Nutrition |
| **Racing License** | Bicycle Pump | Towel |
| **Cycling Clothes** | Flat Tire Repair Kit | Water For Drinking And Washing |
| **Cycling Gloves** | Toilet Tissue | Tip: Some Racers Bring An Indoor Trainer For Warming-Up |

**Make A Race-Day Checklist**  
We recommend that you get everything you need together the night before the race. Many racers like to make a checklist with everything they need. We've made a list of some of the most common items at right, with more important items in bold.  
  
**Plan Your Arrival**  
Plan your pre-race preparation from the race's start time. Most racers like to arrive 1.5 - 2 hours before the start of their race. This gives them enough time to sign in (and/or register), change clothes, pin their race number on, warm-up and use the bathroom. It also allows time for fixing any minor mechanical issues that might arise.

For shorter, more technical courses, you may want to arrive earlier to pre-ride the course. For longer, endurance events, it usually works to arrive slightly later and let the opening miles of the race serve as your warm up. No matter what time you arrive, we recommend having a plan for your pre-race preparation. Few things will leave you feeling as deflated as missing the start of your favorite event!

Ready now? OK, get out there and enjoy the speed and thrill of competition!