

Training Program for the Novice Cyclist

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Great masters continue practicing the basics of their disciplines throughout their lives. This training program covers the basics of bicycling. You can learn and improve every day you ride. The main tool for success in this program is your commitment to get out and ride. Following this program will help motivate and train you both mentally and physically to complete your goal more easily and efficiently. Although this manual was prepared with the novice cyclist in mind, it is a good refresher for the experienced cyclist as well. It is always helpful to refer to the basics.

Preparation:

When you cycle, we recommend you carry at least the following items on your bike:

- Spare tube
- Tire Levers
- Patch Kit
- Red Rear-blinker light
- Water Bottles
- Basic hex wrench set (adjusting seat, etc)
- A handlebar bag or trunk bag on rear rack
- Some extra money and identification
- Rain gear if the weather threatens

The following items should be worn:

- Helmet
- Gloves
- Mirror (either on helmet, glasses or handlebar)
- Bright or light color Jersey, T-Shirt, windbreaker or raingear if riding in bad weather or in diminished light conditions (darkness, fog, tunnels, etc.)
- Bike shorts are best for comfort and worn without underwear to prevent seam abrasions
- Sturdy shoes. Bike shoes are the best for pedaling efficiency

Bike fit

Before your first ride, it is important to make sure your bike fits you properly. Go to your local bike shop to get the correct fit. Improper fit can cause discomfort, inefficient cycling and potentially even physical harm.

Rules of the Road and Group Etiquette

A bicycle is considered a vehicle by law so it is of utmost importance that you obey all traffic rules of the road. You are subject to the same fines and penalties as the driver of an automobile. This includes stopping at red lights and stop signs. **Any rider not obeying traffic laws or riding irresponsibly will be asked to leave the ride.**

Be Verbal! Cycling is a social sport and communication is extremely important. When riding in a group or with another rider, cyclists should always call and/or point out any hazardous road conditions such as potholes, sand, broken glass, metal grates, etc. Signal your fellow riders if you do anything to change your direction or pace (slowing down, stopping for lights, stop signs, turns, drinking water, etc.). To help make your actions predictable to vehicles and other cyclists, it is important to cycle at a steady pace without swerving or making unnecessary sudden movements.

When passing other riders always pass on the left. Let the rider know you are passing them (shout out loudly enough to be heard: "on your left" before you reach them) so that they are not startled by your presence. If you pass a rider on the right you may be forcing them into traffic.

If you must ride over a small obstacle in the road (pothole, bump, sticks, sand, etc.) don't panic. Relax your upper body, bend your elbows to act as shock absorbers and keep pedaling at a steady pace. It might also be helpful to move a few inches off your seat to more easily maintain balance.

Keep Hydrated

Stay hydrated both on and off of the bike. Generally, eight - 8 oz. glasses of water daily are recommended for general good health. However, cycling is a strenuous activity that can dehydrate the body easily. Excessive water loss can cause serious muscle cramping and other problems. Always carry at least two filled water bottles, and/or a "camelback" type water container. Always drink BEFORE feeling thirsty. On hot days, plan to drink at least about one water bottle an hour.

Water needs to be supplemented with electrolytes for cycling. One water bottle filled with H₂O and one with an electrolyte additive is an excellent way to make sure you have the right mix of both. There are many electrolyte supplements sold at bike shops (cytomax being the most popular). However, even Gatorade or PowerAde sold in grocery stores and mini-marts is beneficial. Many cyclists try to consume 50% electrolyte drinks and 50% water during the day.

Nutrition & Eating Lots of Food

Our bodies are very efficient machines. And, as we all know, machines need fuel to function properly. Cycling burns an incredible amount of calories (600-700) per hour. That is why it is such a wonderful exercise for both fitness and fat loss. However, we need to constantly fuel our bodies to cycle efficiently. "Ride to eat and eat to ride" is a very common cycling motto...and, it really says it all!

Three-quarters of the planet is made up of water and our bodies are almost 80% water, so start with foods that contain lots of liquid. Consume plenty of vegetables and fruits, and remember that protein is important for building and restoring muscle.

Reducing "junk food" will help cut the excess weight we carry, but don't go crazy eliminating all fats from your diet. Fat is in fact a very efficient fuel, as long as it is consumed in moderation. Just remember to eat healthy, well-balanced meals.

When we are on our bikes our goal is to never go "hungry". Try to eat every hour when cycling, even if it is only a "Power Bar" type food. If you start feeling hungry on the bike...it is already too late. Constant intake of small portions of food is important. The first time you feel the dreaded "bonk" (calorie depletion) on your bike, you will never want to experience it again. Good bike food is a personal choice so try different things...Power Bars, Cliff Bars, dried fruits and nuts, corn nuts, pumpkin seeds, trail mix, etc. Power gels such as Gu and Cliff Shot are great short-term fixes. Candy bars and other "sweets" will not sustain you over the long haul. However, if all you can find is a candy bar on the road, Snicker's bars are highly recommended.

Breathing Technique

We all take breathing for granted. The object in any aerobic sport is to get oxygen into our lungs to fuel our muscles. This is particularly important when we start to climb and push our muscles to their maximum capacity. However, there is an important technique to getting the most out of our breathing. First, breathe in deeply through your nose, filling your abdomen and then your chest. Then breathe out through your mouth emptying your chest and finally your stomach. (The normal tendency is to take short, quick, shallow breaths through the mouth).

Take the time to slow your breathing down with this technique and you will feel calmer and more in control...especially on climbs where you want to develop a comfortable rhythm.

Stretching

The best way to warm-up for cycling is actually on the bike. Start with 15 minutes of nice easy spinning (at low intensity) before starting any serious cycling. Stretching exercises using cold muscles can cause more harm than good. The most important time to stretch out those muscles is AFTER cycling. Do stretches for your neck, shoulders, back and legs... but stretching beyond the normal range of motion is dangerous. A rule to follow is that stretching must be free of pain. Stretching during the ride at rest stops is also recommended.

Pedaling Terminology

The following terminology will be used to describe pedaling form:

The easy gears: The easiest gear (easiest to pedal) combination is when the chain is on the small ring in the front combined with any of the biggest gears (known as cogs) in the back. When you are in the easy gears your legs can "spin" quickly with little effort.

The hard gears: The hardest gear (the hardest to pedal) combination is when the chain is on the big ring in the front and any of the smallest gears (or cogs) in the back. When in the hard gears, your legs turn with much more resistance.

Riding Technique: Shifting

The idea is to learn to shift smoothly, matching the shifting of your gears with the cadence of your pedal strokes. The goal will be to keep shifting your gears so that you can keep your feet turning the pedals from 70 to 100 revolutions per minute. The "ultimate" is to maintain 90 rpm on almost any terrain (with the exception of long steeper climbs). This involves much shifting, which will eventually come quite naturally. Riders are known to "save" a gear on a climb for an "emergency". All of the gears on your bike are meant to be used... not saved.

Experiment with your gears until you find your comfort zone. Move the gears up and down as the terrain varies. If you find yourself bouncing on the saddle, it is a sign that you are spinning too fast. At this point, either slow down your rpms, or shift to a harder gear, which naturally slows your pedal stroke.

When shifting to a harder gear to get more resistance, keep pedaling smoothly so as not to grind metal or drop your chain. Use the harder gears mostly for flats and descents. If you need or want to stand on your bike, try shifting one or two times to a harder gear to give you more resistance. You will need this resistance to support your weight when you stand.

NOTE: Only 1 gear combination should not be used... This is the big chain ring in the front (the hardest) combined with the biggest cog in the back (the easiest). This is called "cross-chaining" and causes too much stress on your chain.

Riding Technique: Pedaling on the Flats

Most novice riders love to ride on the flats. However, flats can be as difficult as any hills, just add a good strong headwind. When facing a strong headwind, find an easy gear, stay as aerodynamic (low on your handlebar) as possible and have patience.

While on the flats, scan at least 20 feet or so in front of you. This requires concentration. Looking ahead will help you maintain a straight line, avoid hazardous conditions, and allow you to enjoy the scenery! Remember to spin at 70 - 100 rpm.

Focus on rotating the pedals in perfect circles. In order to make a perfect circle you must also be able to pull up on a pedal. Pedals should be either clipless (where the shoe has a cleat which clips right onto the pedal), or have toe clips. A cyclist loses at least 30 - 40% of his or her power by using a regular pedal.

Riding Technique: Climbing

Most novice riders dread hills. However, hills can be conquered by technique and relaxation (remember those breathing exercises?). Just remember that every hill is a great hill, once you get to the top! That's where the best views and the biggest rewards are located. There are four important things to remember about climbing:

1. Ride at your own pace.
2. Have patience
3. Practice your breathing technique
4. Use an easy gear (try to spin)

Technique makes climbing easier, but it takes practice. Always anticipate the climb. Shift into an easier gear BEFORE you have to. Once you are into a steep climb it becomes more difficult to shift to an easier chain ring. Position your body toward the back of the saddle to allow for the fullest extension of your legs and place your hands on top of the handlebar for greater leverage. Pull gently on the handlebars, but keep your arms, shoulders, and upper body as relaxed as possible. Pedal in circles and before you know it, you'll be at the top of the climb.

The most efficient way to climb is to stay seated and spin your pedals, however, on a longer, steeper climb it is very beneficial to alter your position from time to time by standing, with your seat out of the saddle. This technique takes practice, but, keep trying and eventually you'll get it. When you are starting to get tired, put your hands on the break hoods and proceed to stand by rotating your upper body weight forward and onto the brakehoods. Shift up to a harder cog before you stand, if necessary, to give you enough resistance to support a strong, smooth pedal stroke. Remember to shift back to an easier gear when you sit back down so that you can start spinning again.

Each position allows you to rest a different set of muscles. This can be repeated over and over during the hill climb.

Remember, you can always stop and rest if you get tired. If you do stop to rest, make it a brief one, as your muscles tend to cool down quickly and make it more difficult to start again.

Riding Technique: Descents

You receive your big reward at the top of the climb...the downhill! Downhills can be as intimidating as a climb, especially if they are steep and curvy. However, once again there are techniques to make it simple, safe and fun.

The descent can be ridden with hands placed either on the brakehoods or the drop part of the handlebar. By staying more upright on the brakehoods, your body will naturally slow you down as it adds resistance to the wind. Apply both front and rear brakes (at the same time) intermittently to slow yourself down.

Before entering a turn, keep your eyes up and visualize your route and then go easy into the turn. Anticipate your speed in the turn by braking BEFORE entering the curve. Try to brake as little as possible while in the curve.

When approaching the turn look to the inside of the curve and move the bike and your body as one unit. Be aware that your bike will follow your line of sight. Focus is of the utmost importance. Losing your focus or line of sight will cause you to ride out of the turn. Focus on looking toward the inside of every turn and this will become second nature.

If at any point into the turn you feel as if you are about to lose control, just remember to look at the inside of the turn and you and the bike will recover as one unit. Be aware of sand or debris on the road in the turns. If you end up on loose sand or debris DO NOT brake hard as this could cause you to skid.

Tip

Body Position when curving to the right: Your right knee is up and your left foot is down applying downward pressure on the pedal to increase the bicycle's stability.

Body Position when curving to the left: Your left knee is up and your right foot is down applying downward pressure on the pedal.

Rest and Recovery

Rest and recovery time are important to any training program. While training, you should have at least one day of rest per week to allow your body to recuperate. It is during the rest period that your body actually gets stronger.

By taking one or two days off each week, your body gets to rid itself of built up lactic acid and restore muscle glycogen.

After only several weeks of training you will begin to see both mental and physical changes. Learn to listen to your body. It will tell you what it needs.

Alternate Training Tip

Not all of us have the luxury of riding our bikes 5 or 6 days a week, either due to time constraints or to bad weather. We highly recommend "spinning classes" which are often held in local gyms or spin centers all over the country. One hour in a good spin class is the equivalent of a two-hour bike ride. But remember, nothing substitutes for a great outdoor training ride.

Keep in mind, while you are in training for Odyssey, you are benefiting yourself both physically and mentally. The more trained you are by the time you start this adventure the more you will be able to enjoy yourself. Good luck in your training and enjoy the ride!