

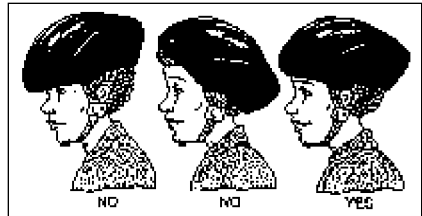
# Helmets

## SHOULD YOU WEAR A HELMET?

The easy and obvious answer is **Yes!** California law requires bicyclists under 18 years of age to properly wear an approved bicycle helmet whenever riding on public roads, and in public parks. For adults, wearing a helmet is always the best idea. A helmet can save you from preventable and unnecessary head and brain injury. A brain injury is very serious, and should be avoided whenever possible. Standard adult bike helmet designs are still most commonly used, but many commuters are choosing go with more head coverage – either because they come from a BMX, skateboarding, skating, or skiing background, or because they just want more protection. The rise in commute cycling and the explosion of the helmet fashion industry has even led to “commuter” helmets, that have a tougher shell and can better absorb the abuse of daily bike rack parking, storage under your desk, and so on.

## PROPER HELMET FIT, ADJUSTMENT AND USE

As shown below, helmets should be worn level on the head, with one finger’s width between the rider’s eyebrow and the bottom edge of the helmet. Ear slides should be



positioned just below the ears and chin straps should be snug, with no visible slack under the chin.

If your helmet does not fit correctly, it will not protect you as well. Similarly, if you do not adjust the straps, buckles and ear slides correctly, even a properly fitted helmet may not protect you like it could and should. Even the ear slides are crucial to protecting your brain. Take a moment every couple of months to re-check your helmet and adjust it as needed.

## REPLACING YOUR HELMET

You should usually replace your helmet after any significant crash. Damaged helmets should be thrown away or returned to the manufacturer for replacement. Many helmet companies offer “Replacement



The bilingual helmet fitting guide above is designed for youth, but applies to all ages. It is available as a pdf at [www.bicycle.sfgov.org](http://www.bicycle.sfgov.org).

Policies” and will replace a crashed helmet free, or at reduced cost, so that they may inspect and learn from crashed helmets.

### THE LIFESPAN OF A BIKE HELMET

Common wisdom is that a styrofoam bicycle helmet should be replaced every three to five years, depending on how hard it is used, exposure to the elements – especially sun – and original manufacture date. A sticker inside your helmet should tell you when it was “born.”



SF Bicycle Coalition volunteers distribute free helmets to youth, and do bike tune-ups at a community event in the Bayview.

### HELMET RESOURCES

Several studies have shown that cost is a large factor in bicycle helmet use. Helmets can usually be found at larger discount stores, starting at around \$15. If you want a higher quality helmet, there are now discount purchase programs available to school, community, and faith-based groups, to help provide access to people who otherwise might have to spend the cost of a helmet on something more urgent, like rent or groceries. The MTA Bicycle Program is also establishing a “Helmet Bank” so that the children of low-income families will have better access to bicycle helmets. For information on the SF Helmet Bank, call 585-BIKE or email [bicycle@sfgov.org](mailto:bicycle@sfgov.org) and leave a message.

### HELMET BUYING GUIDE

Choose a helmet you like, that fits you correctly, and that you will want to wear. In addition to life-saving potential, bicycle helmets have several other benefits. You will keep cooler with helmets because of the way the vents are designed on your helmet. A continuous flow of cool air is driven over your head like a cool breeze. Some helmets come with a visor, or better yet, a removable visor.

## HELMET SAFETY STANDARDS

CPSC and Snell Memorial Foundation are the two helmet certifications to look for when buying a new helmet. The older ANSI and ASTM standards may still appear in older batches of helmets still in retail stock. Look for CPSC and/or Snell certification stickers inside the helmet.

### **Bicycle helmets typically come in at least 3 different sizes.**

**Small** is typically 20 to 22 inches;

**Medium** is typically 22 to 23 1/2 inches; and

**Large** is typically 23 1/2 to 24 1/2 inches.

Infant, Toddler, Youth and XL sizes are often available also.

For accurate sizing, measure your head right above the eyebrows, where the helmet should be worn. Bicycle helmets come with changeable fitting pads, so you can adjust your helmet to fit perfectly. After you purchase your bicycle helmet, read the instructions carefully, and make sure your helmet fits snug and securely. The owner's manual will also inform you of any crash replacement policy that the manufacturer may offer.

More expensive helmets do not equate to safer helmets. The added benefits you get are lighter weight, advanced strapping systems, more vents, or more rugged construction. Be aware of gimmicks. You want a smoothly rounded outer shell, with

no sharp ribs or snag points. A large number of vents may mean less area contacting your head, which could concentrate force on one point. "Aero" helmets are not noticeably faster, and in a crash the "tail" could snag or knock the helmet aside. Skinny straps are less comfortable. Dark helmets are harder for motorists to see. Rigid visors can snag or shatter in a fall. Helmet standards do not address these issues--it's up to you to make these choices.