

## Avoiding Collisions and Injuries

Wear your helmet! Helmets will never prevent collisions, but they do a great job of preventing brain injuries when worn properly. For more information, see the section on HELMETS in this Guide.

### EMERGENCY BICYCLE HANDLING SKILLS

Sometimes you'll do everything right and still end up in trouble. It is a good idea to learn a few physical skills that will allow you to take evasive action when you find yourself in a sticky situation. These and other skills are part of the "Road 1" class offered free by the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition in collaboration with the MTA Bicycle Program and the San Francisco County Transportation Authority (See BICYCLE EDUCATION section of this Guide.) This class, in conjunction with the in-class "Street Skills" session, provides cyclists with training in urban riding skills that will reduce the risks of collision and injury. Both classes are based on the national curriculum



Instructor teaching safety skills during "Road 1" class.

of the League of American Bicyclists (LAB) and are taught by certified LAB Cycling Instructors (LCIs). For more information on these classes, or on becoming an LCI, please call 431-BIKE or visit [www.sfbike.org/edu](http://www.sfbike.org/edu).

The following skills can help you avoid crashes and collisions. Each skill takes practice to master, but is worth the time and effort. Practice these maneuvers in a safe, controlled place – not on the street in traffic!



Shoulder check near the Civic Center.



Instructor teaches the shoulder check at "Road 1" class.

**SHOULDER CHECK:** This is simply looking behind you over your left shoulder to see what is coming behind you. Why look over your left shoulder? It's the one that is on the side of traffic, and when you look over it, you'll see what traffic is coming up behind you. Practice looking back over your left shoulder without swerving. You need to be able to do this shoulder check while riding a steady straight line, so that you don't swerve into traffic or into parked cars! An easy way to practice this is to ride straight away from a friend and have them hold up some fingers. When you look back yell out how many fingers they are holding up. Repeat this drill until you can ride straight while looking back, and are comfortable doing it.



As the rider brakes for a "Quick Stop" she shifts her weight back on the seat and lower, to improve traction on the asphalt.

**QUICK STOP:** This skill involves stopping as fast as you can, without skidding, losing control, or going over the handlebars. As you begin to brake evenly with both brakes, you will slide your weight back on your seat, giving the rear tire more traction. This

will help you stop faster and under better control. In a typical stopping situation, 80% of your weight is on your front wheel. At high speeds this can mean that you lose control, that your rear tire skids, or that you fly over your handlebars.



"Road 1" students dodge a sponge while learning the "Rock Dodge".

**ROCK DODGE:** The Rock Dodge is a simple and useful skill for urban riding. It allows you to quickly and easily avoid rocks, glass, bottle crowns, small potholes, and other things you don't want to ride over or through. To practice this skill, while riding straight at speed, you will first "twitch" your handlebars slightly one direction, and then "twitch" them back in the opposite direction. This steers the bike out from underneath you and instantly creates a slight lean in your bike, while allowing your body to continue in its straight path of travel. The wheels and tires will avoid the rock and you'll still be happily on your way. You may also want to put your weight on your pedals and lift your weight slightly from your seat. If you hit the rock with your weight on your seat, you are more likely to

get a flat tire. If you shift your weight to the pedals, this type of flat tire can usually be avoided.



Students practice instant turns during “Road 1” class.

**INSTANT TURN:** This skill is useful in avoiding a collision when a car overtakes you and makes a right turn in front of you. If you do not have time to stop, you’ll need an escape route and the best thing to do is to follow the car around the corner. This requires high speed cornering skills, that you can gradually learn from this drill. The other time this is most useful in city traffic is when you have an oncoming vehicle make a left turn in front of you.

In order to practice this skill you need an asphalt surface (playground, tennis or basketball court, empty parking lot, etc.) Start slowly and pick up speed as you repeat the drill and get more comfortable with this skill. As in the Rock Dodge above, while riding straight at speed, you will first “twitch” your handlebars slightly, but in the opposite direction of the way you want to turn. This steers the bike out

from underneath your body and instantly creates a lean in the direction you wish to turn and prepares you to turn much sharper without losing control. After the “twitch” of the handlebars you will then turn your handlebars the other direction and turn hard into your INSTANT TURN.

**NOTE:** This skill is awkward-feeling and it will take some time to develop a comfort level while doing the Instant Turn. At first, your body will fight to do the opposite of what you ask it during this drill. For this reason you should start slowly and build the skill as you get more comfortable.