

# Get **cycling**

A guide to choosing and using your bike



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# get cycling

There's a good reason why you never forget how to ride a bike. Cycling solves so many problems at once. It keeps you fit, it's fast, cheap, reliable and good for the environment.

Buy the right bike and it will become your indispensable travelling companion. You can use a bike to get to work, school, the shops, or out into the fresh air for pure enjoyment. Cycling is one of the easiest forms of exercise to fit into your daily routine.

This book of practical advice and tips is brought to you by sustainable transport charity Sustrans, Connecting Wiltshire and Wiltshire Council, to help you choose, use and look after your bike.





## the perfect size for the right ride

The most important thing is to buy the right size frame for you.



### Tip

Ask your local bike shop for a test ride before you buy. To find a list of all the specialist cycle retailers in Wiltshire, visit **www.thecyclingexperts.co.uk**

Unlike children's bikes, there are no standard guidelines on different size frames for adults. The size of frame depends on the type of bike you want, and the type of riding you will be doing.

If you need to stop quickly you'll be glad that you chose a frame size that gave you clearance from the cross bar of at least an inch or more. For mountain biking you'll need even more clearance since you'll be putting your feet down quite a lot.

If you intend to use your bike to get to work it's worth finding out if your employer runs, or is willing to set up, a **Cycle to Work scheme**. You could **save around 40% on the price of your bike** and accessories and also pay for them in easy stages. As the choice of bikes available to you will vary depending on your employer's scheme provider make sure you are still able to buy the right bike for you.



The **cross bar** is the main tube on the bicycle frame that runs from the saddle to the handlebars. Some women's and unisex bikes don't have a cross bar.

# buying the right bike for you

Different bikes have different uses. Choose the type of bike which reflects the majority of journeys you intend to make. And remember, as with most things, you get what you pay for, and sometimes bikes come with lots of extra features that you might not need.



**Road bikes** are lightweight with skinny tyres. Most have drop handlebars and they're designed to be aerodynamic and speedy. Racing bikes are lightweight and fast. Some of these cannot be fitted with panniers. Touring bikes are sturdier versions of racing bikes suitable for long distance rides with panniers to carry your luggage.



**Mountain bikes** have sturdy frames, knobbly tyres and highly effective brakes. They often have suspension and a wide selection of lower gears, perfect for all types of terrain. With slick tyres they are also comfortable for city riding.



**Hybrid bikes** are a cross between the speed of a road bike and the strength and gearing of a mountain bike. They are lightweight but sturdy with smooth tyres and an upright riding position suitable for a wide variety of terrain. A good everyday option.





### **Dutch bikes, roadsters and city bikes**

offer a more upright sitting position and often have enclosed gears. They are slower than hybrids, but they protect your clothes. Perfect for shorter trips around town.



**Folding bikes** are ideal for people who commute on public transport but use their bikes at either end of their trip. These bikes fold down compactly, and have smaller wheels and fewer gears.



**Electrically assisted bikes** are great if you need extra help to get up hills, or have a longer daily commute. The power kicks in when you pedal, helping you up the hill rather than completely taking over.



**Recumbent bikes and tricycles** are useful for people with mobility problems.

# getting your bike set up

Getting the right size of bike is the first step. By making a few simple adjustments your bike will be a perfect fit.



## Tip

Make sure you can still reach the brake levers once you've adjusted your handlebars!

## riding position

Your riding position can be altered by adjusting the saddle and handlebars.

**There are three things you want to achieve:**

- 1 The right saddle height – to make the most of your leg power or to make sure you can put a reassuring foot on the ground;
- 2 Good contact with your pedals to maximise the power in your legs;
- 3 Ability to reach the handlebars and your brakes – for good control and comfort.

Everyone is different so you will need to find a comfortable balance that suits you.

## handlebar position

Well positioned handlebars are crucial for your comfort, and important for control of your steering and brakes.

Handlebars vary in how they can be adjusted. A good position to start is with your handlebars at the same height as your saddle. If you prefer a more aerodynamic 'head down' position, lower the bars. If you want a 'head up' riding position that's easier on your back and gives confidence in traffic, raise the bars.

## saddle position

Getting the saddle in the right place will help you get the most from your pedal power without straining your body.

Bikes have a handy feature that allows you to move the saddle forwards or backwards and adjust its angle. Adjust the saddle so your leg pushes vertically down on the pedal. If you find you want to slide forward or backwards as you ride, adjust the saddle to suit.

Use an adjustable spanner or an allen key (depending on your bike) to loosen the bolt underneath the saddle at the top of the seat post. You can then slide your saddle backwards or forwards and tilt it up or down. Tighten it well before trying!

## adjusting saddle height

To find the right height for your saddle:

- 1 Place your bike next to a large wall;
- 2 Hop on and put one hand on the wall for balance;
- 3 Put the ball of your foot on the pedal at its lowest point without stretching. Your leg should be straight. If you find you're rocking from side to side when you ride, you're probably too high and cycling will be harder work.

To adjust the height of your saddle undo the bolt or quick release at the top of the frame so you can slide the seat post up or down, making sure you don't go past the minimum mark. If your seat needs to be higher than the seat post allows, you need a longer seat post or a bigger bike.

## different saddles

Women tend to have wider hips than men, and so women's saddles are wider than men's for the correct fit. Do make sure your saddle is comfortable – it can make all the difference to the enjoyment of riding your bike.





## care for it and it will care for you

Like any machine, a bike will work better and last longer if you care for it properly. Get in the habit of checking your bike regularly – simple checks and maintenance can help you have hassle-free riding and avoid repairs.



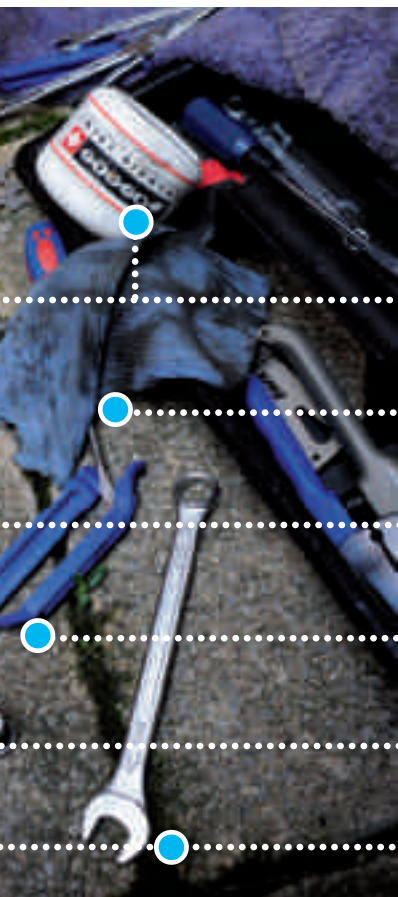
### Tip

If in doubt, leave it to the professionals. Bike mechanics are much more affordable than car mechanics, and some will even collect your bike from home and return it when all the work is done.





# love your bike



## tools

There are specialist tools for specific tasks, but all you need to get started are:

- a pump
- an old toothbrush
- lubricants and grease
- cleaning rags
- a puncture repair kit
- tyre levers
- allen keys and screwdrivers
- spanners



### Tyre levers

are small plastic tools that attach to the spokes of your wheel and help to ease the tyre away from your wheel rim. Tyre levers are really helpful if you have a puncture.

An **allen key**, also known as a **hex** or **zeta key**, is a tool used to drive screws and bolts that have a hexagonal socket in the head and are extremely handy for maintaining bicycles.

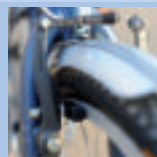
## regular checks



### every week

Check your tyres, brakes, lights, handlebars and seat are in good order and tightly secured. Any wheel quick releases must be in the closed position.

Do your light batteries need replacing or your tyres need more air? Are your brakes squeezing the rim of the wheel (if they're touching the tyre that's not good) and are your handlebars and saddle secure?



### every month

Give your chain a really good wipe clean and lubricate with chain oil;

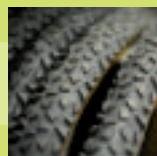
Wipe the dirt from your wheels;

Check the tread on your tyres - any bulges or bald spots mean that you need new tyres;

Check your brake pads aren't touching the tyres, and check there is still life in the pads - if not change them;

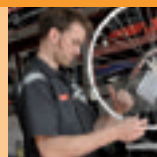
Are your gears changing smoothly? If you're having problems with your gears, it's best to leave gear adjustments and repairs to a bike mechanic;

Check for damaged or frayed gear or brake cables.



### every year

It's worth taking your bike to an experienced mechanic once a year for a thorough service. All good bike shops will have a mechanic who can answer any questions you might have.



## fixing a puncture

Punctures don't happen often and are easy to fix yourself.

If you don't fancy repairing a puncture on your journey, carry a spare inner tube and a pump so you can change the tube, then fix the puncture when you get home.



### Tip

A fully inflated tyre makes life so much easier and reduces punctures. Even a slightly under-inflated tyre will slow you down.



### Tip

Go easy with the oil! Be careful not to get any oil on wheel rims or brake pads. If you do, just clean it off with some lubricant spray and a rag.

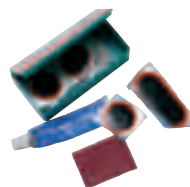
If you don't mind repairing punctures when they happen, make sure you carry your repair kit and pump at all times. All puncture repair kits have full instructions with pictures.

Alternatively, if you don't want to get your hands dirty just take it to your local bike shop and they will fix it for you.



### Tip

Carry a spare inner tube and some tyre levers with you so you don't have to repair a puncture immediately.







## don't lose it, lock it!

**There are three simple ways of cutting the risk of bike theft:**

- ❶ A good lock;
- ❷ Using it effectively;
- ❸ Choosing the right location.

### **Always lock your bike and remove lights and panniers.**

Almost 400,000 bikes are stolen every year in England and Wales, so taking precautions will help keep your bike safe.

**Invest in a strong lock.** Some locks are stronger than others and price influences their quality. D-locks are sturdy, and cable locks are useful to secure any parts of the bike which are quick release such as the saddle or front wheel.

**Think: location, location, location.** Where you lock your bike is critical. Leave it on a well lit and busy street so any potential thieves are conspicuous.

**Home insurance policies** can often easily be extended to include your bike when it is at home. Take a photo of the bike and write down the frame number.

**Bike insurance policies** are available and cover your bike when you're out and about. Find out more at [www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)



#### **Tip**

Replace quick releases with regular bolts to make them more secure.



#### **Tip**

Never leave home without your lock!

# never leave home without your essential accessories!



Accessorising is the key to any good outfit and riding a bike is no different. Carefully chosen extras can transform any bike from a leisure vehicle into a valuable year-round mode of transport.

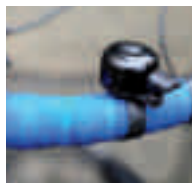
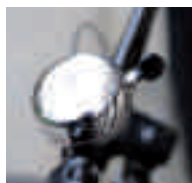
## helmet

A helmet will not prevent accidents from happening but can provide protection if you do fall off your bike. They are particularly recommended for young children. Ultimately, wearing a helmet is a question of individual choice and parents need to make that choice for their children.

Always buy a new helmet which conforms to one of the recognised safety standards such as BS or CE, fits correctly, and is comfortable. Follow the fitting instructions or ask your local bike shop to help you choose a correctly fitting helmet. Check your helmet regularly and, if it takes a bash, always replace it as it will not offer the same protection.

## bell

A bell is a must for any considerate cyclist. A friendly tinkle will let people know you're approaching, but never assume they can hear you.





## pop it in your pannier!

Panniers are bags which attach onto pannier racks usually at the bag of the bike. Using panniers rather than a rucksack can make your ride more comfortable and stop you from getting a sweaty back.

If you don't want to invest in panniers, strap your rucksack to a bike rack, or put a basket on the front.



There are an amazing variety of panniers. Have a look at [www.sustransshop.co.uk](http://www.sustransshop.co.uk) for some ideas or ask at your local bike shop.



## trailers

Trailers let you carry shopping, pets and children – anything you want really! You might be surprised at how much you can fit on a bike.



## children's seats and tagalongs

Babies can be carried on bicycles as soon as they can support their own head. For more information check out [www.sustrans.org.uk/freerangekids](http://www.sustrans.org.uk/freerangekids)





## cycle clips

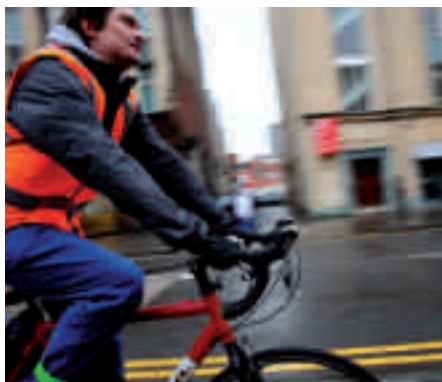
Clips, slap bands, elastic bands or leg-warmers can all be used to keep wide trousers away from the chain.



## lights

See and be seen! When cycling in the dark, you are required by law to have a white light on the front and a red light on the rear. These can clip onto your bike, backpack or your clothes.

Think about carrying a second pair of cheap lights or spare batteries.



## reflectives

A reflective or high-viz bag cover, tape or stickers can help you be seen at night and in the day. You can also buy hi-viz waterproof pannier covers.



## mudguards

A lot of bikes are still sold without mudguards, so you'll need to get a pair fitted if you want to avoid mud or dirty water being sprayed up your back in wet weather.



## pump

You can buy a cheap hand-held pump or a floor-stand pump. There are a couple of types of bike valves. Most pumps will adjust to fit both or you can buy an adaptor.



## what to wear?

For the majority of short local cycling trips there is no need to wear special clothing, any more than you would for a walk to the shops. In fact, it's possible to cycle in smart clothes, skirts and dresses, provided they give you enough freedom to pedal.

### does the shoe fit?

Shoes that are suitable for walking are also great for cycling. You can cycle in heels if you want to or change shoes at your destination.

### glow in the dark

If you ride at night or in heavy traffic, it's important to make yourself as visible as possible to other users. A reflective vest or jacket is ideal. Vests are a cheap solution and easy to stow in your bag; and reflective bands for ankles and sleeves are also good to get you seen.

### extremely cold extremities?

Wear gloves to keep the cold away, and ear muffs can be handy.

### don't let a little rain hold you back

Once people start riding, they generally don't want to stop! People even enjoy riding in the rain – honestly! All you need is a waterproof jacket and trousers plus some reflective gear.



# cycling and public transport

☀ Folding bicycles can be taken on any train service or bus.

☀ You can hire folding bikes at Bristol, Exeter, Southampton, Reading and London Waterloo rail stations. Hire points will soon be coming to Chippenham and Swindon. Visit **[www.bromptondock.co.uk](http://www.bromptondock.co.uk)** for more information.

☀ You can hire leisure bikes in Bradford-on-Avon, Chippenham and Salisbury.

☀ A limited number of full size bicycles can be carried on services as well. For services in Wiltshire you do not have to reserve a space but it is a good idea, particularly at peak times. You can reserve a space at the station or phone the rail operator:

**First Great Western 0845 7000 125**

**South West Trains 0845 6000 650 (option 4)**

☀ Bicycles are not allowed on some South West Train services which arrive or depart from London Waterloo or Clapham Junction at peak times.

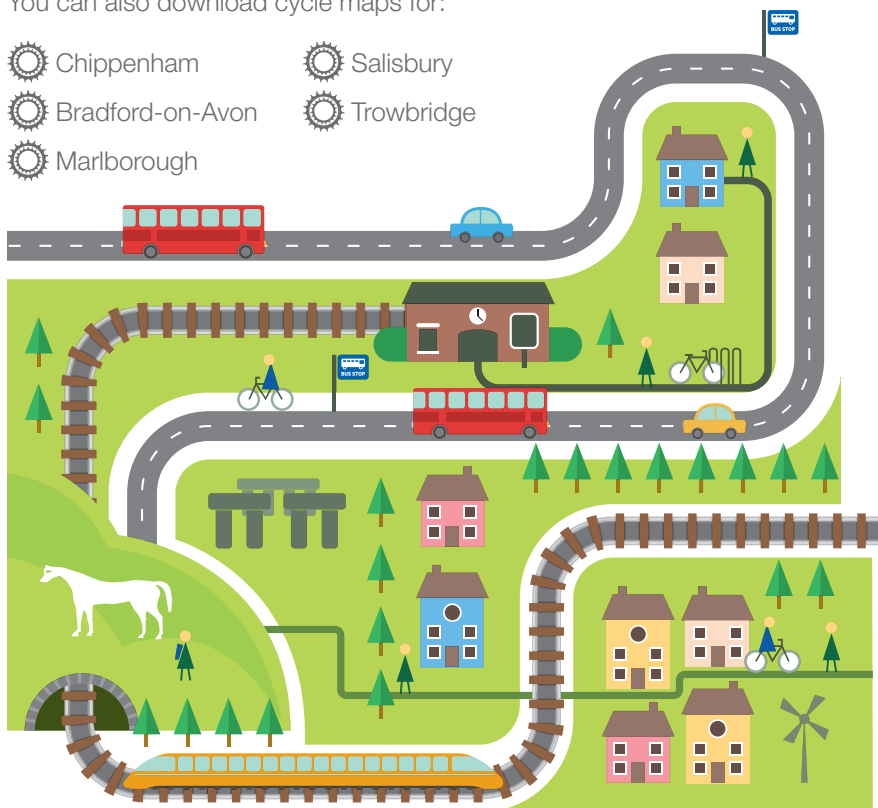
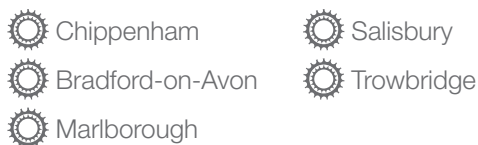
☀ Another option is to buy a cheap second-hand bike and to leave it at your destination station.

Find out more at **[www.connectingwiltshire.co.uk](http://www.connectingwiltshire.co.uk)**



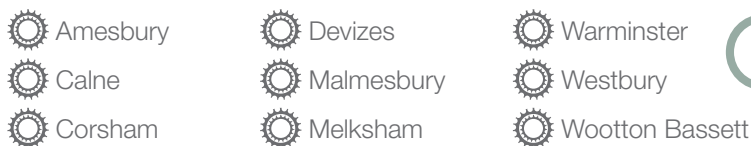


You can also download cycle maps for:



You can also find leisure routes and suggested rail-cycle day trips.

In the future, maps will be available for:





[www.connectingwiltshire.co.uk](http://www.connectingwiltshire.co.uk)

You can pick up paper copies of these maps at the relevant Tourist Information Centre or email us at **[connectingwiltshire@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:connectingwiltshire@wiltshire.gov.uk)**






# where can I go?

## the roads are your oyster!

### when you plan your route you should aim for...

-  Quiet roads or cycle paths;
-  Low speed limits;
-  Bus lanes;
-  Parks and open spaces which allow cycling.

### ...and avoid:

-  Very busy junctions;
-  Large and fast roundabouts;
-  Pavements;
-  Dual carriageways;
-  Lorry-heavy routes.

If any of these are unavoidable, don't let it defeat you, you can always get off and push!



#### Tip

If you're thinking about cycling to work, why not use the weekend for a trial run?

Plan your routes around quiet streets and interesting places – the whole road network is open to you and there are lots of cycle paths and traffic-free routes out there.

### types of path

**It is illegal to cycle on a pavement** – use roads, byways or cycle paths.

**Public bridleways** can be used by walkers, cyclists and horse riders. By law, those on two wheels should give way to other users. Remember the surfaces can be variable and not always suitable for all bikes.

**Shared use paths** are free of motor traffic and designated for use by walkers, cyclists and sometimes horse riders. These paths generally have good surfaces.

Several of Sustrans' **National Cycle Network (NCN)** routes pass through Wiltshire:

**NCN 4** is a long distance route between London and Fishguard via Reading, Bath, Bristol, Newport, Swansea, Carmarthen, Tenby, Haverfordwest and St. Davids.

**NCN 24** will run from Bath through Radstock and Frome in Somerset, then Warminster and Salisbury to join with **NCN 23** at Eastleigh in Hampshire.

**NCN 45** will connect Salisbury in Wiltshire with Chester in Cheshire, via Swindon, Cirencester, Gloucester, Worcester and Whitchurch.

There are also many local routes. **The Wiltshire Cycleway** is a circular route passing through many of Wiltshire's towns.

Look for the blue route signs or visit **[www.connectingwiltshire.co.uk](http://www.connectingwiltshire.co.uk)**

## know the signs

Most signs and markings relating to cyclists are self-explanatory, but it's worth familiarising yourself with the ones below.



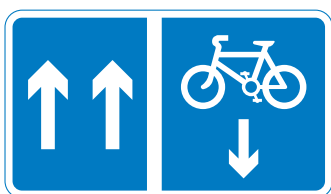
When you are on the **National Cycle Network** you'll see these signs. The number relates to the route you are following with red for National route and blue for Regional route.



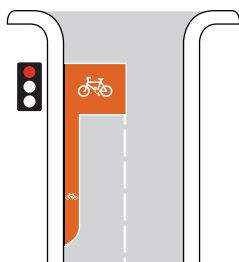
A **shared use**, unsegregated cycle and pedestrian route.



**Segregated shared use** route for cyclists and pedestrians. Make sure you ride on the correct side.







A **contra-flow cycle lane** lets you ride against the direction of flow of the one-way street in safety and usually offers a more convenient and direct route.



**Advanced stop lines** for cyclists give you a visible area to wait, where you are segregated from other traffic. At the front of the queue, you can be seen, reducing the chance of a conflict as vehicles turn. You must stay behind the front stop line and must proceed when the lights are green. Motorists must stay behind the first stop line and not obstruct the forward areas.









## tips for motorists







-  **When turning left** watch for cyclists coming up on your near side and don't cut them up;
-  **Give cyclists a wide berth when overtaking;**
-  **At night, dip your headlights** when approaching cyclists;
-  **In wet weather,** allow cyclists extra room as surfaces may be slippery.

Cyclists and motorists are equally entitled to use and share the same road space. On roundabouts slow down and try not to overtake cyclists.





## tips for cyclists on roads

-  **Ride in a position where you can see and be seen;**
-  **Make eye contact** with other road users, especially at junctions, then you know they've seen you;
-  **Signal clearly** at all times;
-  **Follow the Highway Code** – don't jump red lights and don't cycle on the pavement unless it's a designated cycle path;
-  **Always use lights at night.** Consider wearing reflective clothing and a helmet;
-  **In wet weather watch your speed** as surfaces may be slippery and it will take you longer to stop.

## tips for cyclists on shared use paths

-  **Don't go too fast** - it can intimidate others;
-  **Use your bell or call out** to let others know you are approaching, but don't assume they can hear or see you;
-  **Give way** to others and always be prepared to slow down and stop if necessary;
-  **Keep left** or on your side of any dividing line. Give walkers and wheelchair users plenty of room;
-  **Be careful** at junctions, bends or entrances.
-  **Take care around horse riders** especially when approaching from behind.

## tips for other path users

-  **Listen for bells.** Bells are not an order for you to get out of the way. They are to make you aware that cyclists are looking for a safe opportunity to pass.
-  **Allow cyclists to pass when it's safe.** Remember cyclists need time to brake and stop.
-  **Keep your dog under control.**
-  **Keep to your side of any dividing line.** Please be tolerant where space is limited.

# it's a girl thing

Why use an exercise bike that's chained to the floor? Riding a bike is one of the easiest ways for women to keep fit. It's kinder on your purse than gym membership and, unlike the aerobic class, can get you from A to B.

Cycling to work, to the shops, or with the kids to school is an ideal way to fit this healthy activity into your busy routine.

## Here are a few handy hints to help you look good and feel confident.

- ☀ Specialist clothing is not necessary for most short, local trips. Just about anything goes but keep items like long scarves and wide-leg trousers away from your bike's moving parts. For shorter skirts, you can wear tights, leggings or shorts underneath to protect your modesty;
- ☀ Ride at a steady pace and you won't arrive at your destination looking hot and sweaty. Pedal power is the quickest way to get around town and your journey time won't vary with traffic;
- ☀ Get some training. Whatever your ability, a cycle lesson with a qualified instructor can improve your skills and boost your confidence. Find out more at [www.connectingwiltshire.co.uk](http://www.connectingwiltshire.co.uk)
- ☀ Bike frames for women tend to be shorter as on average women have longer legs and shorter arms. A female-specific saddle will also make your ride more comfortable.



### Tip

Just 30 minutes of pedal pushing burns over 300 calories. Cycling firms your thighs and bottom, and can even tone the tummy muscles.

### How can I find out more?

For inspiration and practical advice such as cycling during pregnancy visit:

[www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)



## cycling with children

Kids love bikes and love to ride. Cycling helps kids to grow up fit, healthy and independent, and introduces them to the wider world and the adventure it holds.

Make the most of the great outdoors with these top tips for your family trips.

When on a family bike ride **remember to take snacks** and drinks to keep their energy and spirit levels up.

**Don't be too ambitious.** It's much better that everyone wants to go out again, than all coming home exhausted, tearful and permanently put off.

Keep the cycling trips packed with interest. **Plan your trip around interesting stops and sights along the way.** Don't make journey times longer than they're happy to sit and play at home.

**Keep them warm.** When a young child is on the back of a bike, they won't be generating heat like the person doing all the pedalling! Even on a fine day, take extra clothes and waterproofs – just in case.

**Be careful not to pinch their skin when putting their helmet on.** It's easily done and often ends in tears. Just place your forefinger between the clip and the chin.

**Ride in a line with the children in the middle of the adults.** If there's only one of you, the adult should be at the rear, keeping an eye on all the children in front.

**how can I find out more?**

For useful tips and hints, visit [www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)

# Turn the key in your own ignition



## **Sustrans makes smarter travel choices possible, desirable and inevitable.**

We're a leading UK charity enabling people to travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day. We work with families, communities, policy-makers and partner organisations so that people are able to choose healthier, cleaner and cheaper journeys, with better places and spaces to move through and live in.

It's time we all began making smarter travel choices.

**Make your move and support Sustrans today.**

**[www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)**



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**[www.connectingwiltshire.co.uk](http://www.connectingwiltshire.co.uk)**

is a one-stop shop for information about cycling, walking, rail, bus and driving.

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