

Fit Facts™

FROM THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EXERCISE®

BIKE + MOUNTAINS = EXCITEMENT AND CHALLENGE

Tired of paved roads? Want to go where there aren't any speed limits? If you answered yes, then your vehicle of choice could very well be a mountain bike. Ever since a group of friends took a fast-paced ride down a steep incline in Northern California, mountain biking has been an exciting challenge to off-road riders. Its inclusion as an event in the 1996 Olympics confirmed what riders already know: Mountain biking is one of the fastest growing sports in the world, both in popularity and participation. If you've never been on a mountain bike you might wonder what all the fuss is about. Many riders say it's the freedom. After all, destinations are unlimited on these machines built for rough terrain.

THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT

Mountain bikes are sturdier than your average 10-speed or hybrid bicycle so they can withstand rough roads. They have wide tires that grip the trail, and cantilever brakes, similar to those found on a motorcycle.

When purchasing a mountain bike, be sure that it isn't too large. You should always be able to put a foot on the ground to steady yourself. A helmet is a must, and knee and elbow pads are sure-fire scar preventers.

YOUR BODY ON A BIKE

Riding a bike is one of the best cardiovascular exercises around. Not only does it provide an aerobic workout, but it strengthens the large muscles of the lower body, including the thighs, hips and buttocks, without putting a lot of stress on the joints. The upper body and arms come into play when climbing hills.

Always warm up before you begin your ride. Pedal in a low gear over flat terrain until you begin to sweat or feel warm.

This usually takes about five to 10 minutes. And don't neglect to cool down when you come to the end of your ride. Gradually lowering your heart rate can help prevent the pooling of lactic acid in the muscles. Again, pedal slowly in a low gear.

ON THE TRAIL

Practice makes perfect isn't a cliché when it comes to handling a mountain bike. Once you start heading up hills and mountains and over rocks and steep



falls, you'll need to rely on your instincts, which, if they don't come naturally, develop through practice. One of the first things to do is to get a feel for how the brakes work. The front brake on a mountain bike usually has more power than the back, and pulling it alone may send you flying over the handlebars. Practice quick stops before you hit the trail so you can feel how your weight may affect how you stop. Cantilever brakes are stronger than

those on other bikes, allowing riders to control factors such as their rate of decline. When descending a hill, lightly squeeze and release the brakes — a technique called feathering — to prevent the wheels from locking.

Change gears as it becomes necessary in order to keep a steady cadence. Use a low gear when you need power, and a high gear when you want speed.

Climbing requires a shift in your weight that will control the tires' grip on the ground. Short, steep hills may require out-of-the-seat pedaling to garner more power. If you try this on a long climb, however, you'll likely tire before you reach the top. Shift your weight forward, off the seat if necessary, to gain the power you need.

GET PEDALING

You can obtain information about trails in your area from your local library or mountain-biking group. The sooner you start pedaling, the sooner you can test your limits — those set by both your body and your mind.

Compliments of:

Put your name and logo in this area, then make handout copies.



Reprinted with permission from the American Council on Exercise.

If you are interested in information on other health and fitness topics, contact: American Council on Exercise, 4851 Paramount Drive, San Diego, CA 92123, 800-825-3636; or, go online at <http://www.acefitness.org> and access the complete list of ACE Fit Facts.