Bicycling Advice to Seniors

Americans are living longer and stronger. The number and percentage of people over the age of 55 continues to grow. This is particularly clear as the baby boomer generation matures. More elder adults than ever before are participating in cycling. Senior cyclists should understand the health and environmental benefits of cycling.

Senior cyclists may be cycling for the first time in many years. So they will need to brush up on current laws and rules that relate to bicyclists and sharing the road. Some senior cyclists may simply be continuing a lifelong cycling habit. But as they grow older, they may be faced with some physical issues that need new solutions.

Senior cyclists may have decades of traffic experience under their belt. But they may not be accustomed to the ways that bicycles function in traffic today. A short bicycle course or workshop can be helpful in bringing them up to speed.

Bicycles are required to ride on the right side of the road. They ride with traffic, not against it. This may be different than the way many seniors first learned to ride. Seniors must learn that:

- This is the current law.
- They may be ticketed for riding against traffic.

Senior cyclists must learn:

- About the various styles of bikes.
- Which one will best suit their needs.
- How to select and purchase a properly fitting helmet.

Seniors should learn the different ways of carrying cargo, and what lights and other accessories, such as a water bottle holder, they may need. They should be introduced to other options, such as gloves and glasses, and how they may benefit from these accessories.

Compare cycling to driving a car. The senior cyclist must remember that as a bicyclist, he or she is a vehicle operator. A cyclist is therefore subject to the same laws as drivers of cars. By adhering to these rules, he or she will help the concept of sharing the road become more of a reality, and create a more inviting, less stressful atmosphere on the roads.

Senior cyclists must learn to maintain a defensive riding attitude, even when the law and right-of-way are in their favor. They should anticipate what a driver MIGHT do. But they should not take it for granted that he or she will actually do it. Senior cyclists should never underestimate the importance of good motorist/cyclist communication through hand signals and eye contact.

Just as they would do when driving a car, senior cyclists should scan traffic regularly by looking around and behind them as they ride. Some senior adults discover that it becomes more difficult to turn their heads to scan as they grow older. If so, they should have a rearview or side mirror mounted to their bike, and learn to use it.

Senior cyclists should learn how to safely navigate their way through intersections and complex traffic situations. They should also be able to recognize and avoid road hazards.

Senior cyclists should explore the “science” of good route selection, and take advantage of bike lanes, bike routes, and multi-use paths. City bicycling maps are generally available at bike shops. These maps are useful in finding such routes.

The senior cyclist should learn how to make him or herself noticeable to others on the road by wearing bright,

reflective clothing.

This information is courtesy of the New Hampshire Highway Safety Agency.
These are good recommendations. But the laws may be different in your state. Be sure to know what they are.

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