



Alegent †
Creighton
Health

Tips for bike commuters:

Here are some tips to make cycling to work (or cycling for fun) easier and more enjoyable.

The bike:

If you are a beginning cyclist one of the best things you can do is make sure you have the right bike. Most beginners will do best on a 'hybrid' bicycle, which is a hybrid of a mountain bike (fat knobby tires) and a road bike (skinny tires and drop handlebars- a racing bike). A hybrid bike has a more upright posture than a road bike and has handlebars that are flat and easy to grip, similar to a mountain bike but the tires are narrower and smoother. If you are buying a new bike go to a bike store and tell them how much you can spend and what kind of riding you want to do. (There are several good bike stores in Omaha. Alegent employees get a 10% discount at Bike Masters at 129th and Fort St.) The bike store will help you select the bike that will work best for you, and will make sure it is the right size. Allow some extra money in your budget for accessories like a tire pump, proper clothing, and helmet.

Accessories for commuting: You will find cycling more enjoyable if you invest in some accessories.

- **Helmet.** Helmets range in price from \$35 to 200, but you can find a good one for about \$50. Helmets should be replaced after a few years or after a crash or if cracked.
- **Bike lock:** buy a cable and lock, which you can get at the bike shop or discount stores. You can leave the lock at the bike rack at work so you do not have to carry it back and forth.
- **Tire pump:** get a good quality 'floor pump' at the bike shop. These cost about \$40. Using a floor pump is more convenient than a gas station, and allows you to fill it to just the right amount of pressure. (It is easy to accidentally overinflate a tire at gas station). The maximum pressure is marked on the tire but you will have a smoother ride if the pressure is a few pounds less than that. Many bikes come with a Presta valve that is different than a car tire valve (Schroeder valve). You need an adapter to fill a Presta tire at the gas station.
- **Clothing:** for short commutes you can wear regular comfortable clothing. You might want to keep a pair of shoes at work so you can wear cycling shoes on your commute. If you are riding more than just a few miles you will find it more comfortable to wear cycling shorts. These shorts have a built in 'chamois' pad for comfort. Bike shorts should be worn without underpants, which cause chafing. You can choose either the road bike style or the mountain bike style, which has an outer layer so they look more like regular shorts.
- **Gloves:** Short trips can be done without gloves but for long rides you will want to wear cycling gloves to help grip the handlebars and protect your hands in case of a fall.

Bike sizing and fit: Bikes are sized in two ways: wheel size and frame size. Most mountain bikes come with 26 inch wheels; hybrid bikes and road bikes come with 700c wheels, which are slightly bigger. For example a common road bike tire size is 700 x 23mm; hybrid tires are often 700 x 35mm. Frames on a road or hybrid bike range from 48 cm to 64 cm, but an average size person would take a 54, 56 or 58 cm frame. Some manufacturers use Small, Medium, or Large. Any reputable bike shop will fit you to the right bike size. Most will also conduct a more specific bike fit for a fee; they will adjust the seat height, saddle position, and handlebars to fit your body and riding style, so that you have a good balance of comfort and performance. If your bike is sized right and the seat adjusted properly your toes will barely touch the ground when seated.

Pedals and shoes: Riding with regular shoes on plain pedals will work fine for short trips, but for longer rides most cyclists find that either toe clips or clipless pedal systems are safer and more comfortable. Toe clips and straps attached to the pedals allow the cyclist to wear any shoes and still secure the foot to the pedal. But most cyclists prefer 'clipless' pedals (with no toe clips). These have a mechanism that anchors the shoes to the pedal, using corresponding cleats attached to the shoes. To start you 'clip in' to the pedal so that your foot is attached securely and cannot slip off. When you stop you twist your foot slightly to release the shoe from the pedal. You will need to purchase the pedals and have the cleats attached to cycling shoes. (The bike shop will do this for you). Pedals cost about \$40 and shoes \$60 and up.

Gears: Multiple gears will help you get up the hills. Most bikes use a derailleur system that moves the chain to different size sprockets. This works well as long as the system is kept adjusted and lubed properly. There is a distinct price/performance balance. Cheaper bikes will have imprecise shifting, and as you move up in price you get more gears, better shifting, greater reliability, and less weight. Don't worry about how many 'speeds' a bike has—more is not necessarily better. It's more important to have the right combination for you.

Where to ride: Most beginners will find it best to start out on quiet streets. On the street make sure you are riding on the right (never against the traffic) and obey the rules of the road. You have a legal right to ride on almost any street although it is best to avoid the busy ones. Another good place to ride is on the paved county roads where traffic is light. Make sure you stay to the right and do not wear ear buds—you need to hear the cars. Riding on trails is good too; just make sure you announce 'bike on your left' as you come upon pedestrians.

Training: when you start cycling you will be using different muscles than you are used to, so you need to start gradually. Initially you will find your legs and butt complaining, but eventually you will find everything getting easier. You cannot hurry this process. Many cyclists find that they need a couple days rest at first, then as you get in shape you can cycle day after day without discomfort. Do short trips at first so you are not stuck far from home, then gradually increase your distance. Make sure you have a good saddle. Many of the saddles on lower end bikes are actually too soft. The saddle has to be firm enough to support your weight on your sit bones without allowing the softer tissues to sink down and have too much pressure. Your sit bones will toughen up after a while so that a long ride will not be a problem.

Traffic concerns:

- Bikes are allowed on all roads except controlled access freeways (ones with on and off ramps). But use your judgement--if you see that traffic is heavy it is best to choose another route.
- Cyclists must observe the rules of the road and should stay to the right as much as practical. Cars are required to pass with at least 3 feet of clearance. It is ok to move to the left lane when making a left turn.
- Make sure you are visible to the cars—make eye contact with motorists when possible. Signal your turns and make sure motorists understand where you are going.
- Do not ride on the left against traffic. Motorists will be confused.
- Watch out for cars turning right; drivers often misjudge the speed of a bike or do not see you and will cut in front of you.
- When passing parked cars allow enough room to avoid being 'doored' from motorists getting out of their cars.

For more advanced riders:

Hills: Eastern Nebraska has plenty of rolling hills that create a challenge for cyclists. (Western Iowa is even hillier). Start the hill in a comfortable gear, then continue shifting to a lower and lower gear as your speed slows. Your pedal cadence should remain about the same as before. Standing up will help for short hills but for long ones you are better to remain seated and use a low gear. If your gears are not low enough your bike shop may be able to put on lower gears.

Nutrition and hydration: Make sure you have water with you at all times. Keep drinking during the ride so you don't get dehydrated. Gatorade and similar products provide good hydration, although they work better if diluted slightly. It is also good to have some granola bars or power bars with you. You should also carry a small amount of cash for a convenience store stop, and a cell phone is a good idea. Make sure that you have some identification and an emergency number in case something happens.

Flats: Purchase a small bag to attach under the seat. It should contain a spare tube, a bike multi tool (about \$15), tire levers, and a CO2 canister inflation system. The canisters work better and faster than a tire pump and are lighter. You can buy a mini-pump that attaches to the frame but it will take a lot of pumping to fully inflate your tire. At home you can use a floor pump which is much easier. Most cyclists find it easier to throw away the punctured tube instead of patching it. Tubes are about \$5 each. Be smart and practice changing a flat at home, before you are stuck somewhere not knowing what to do.

Cycling is a great activity because you can do it regardless of your ability. You do not need to be skinny to ride and have fun. After the initial investment the riding costs nothing, and gives you the benefits of exercise and fresh air.