Helmet Safety

A helmet's primary mission is to guard against head injuries from the impact force of falling off a bike/scooter or other wheeled activity.

Helmets must meet the safety standards established by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) or the Snell Memorial Foundation.

The State of California Department of Health Services recommends:

1. The helmet should fit snugly. Use the foam pads to make it fit.
2. The helmet should cover the forehead.
3. Move the plastic slide to make the straps meet just below both ears.
4. Fasten the strap under the chin, with one finger's width of space between the strap and the chin. The helmet must ALWAYS be buckled.

Gently try to roll the helmet backward and forward, and side to side, on the head. The helmet should not move more than ½ inch in any direction.

Helmet Fit Checklist:

1. EYES check: Position the helmet on your head. Look up and you should see the bottom rim of the helmet (one to two fingers above your eyebrows).
2. EARS check: Make sure the straps of the helmet form a "V" under your ears when buckled. The strap should be snug but comfortable.
3. MOUTH check: Now open your mouth as wide as you can. Do you feel the helmet hug your head? If not, tighten those straps!

FACT: Wearing a helmet can reduce the risk of head injury in a bike crash by as much as 85% and the risk of traumatic brain injury (TBI) by as much as 88%.

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Fitting a Bike Helmet

Proper fit is key. Measure the circumference of your head an inch above the ear at the top of the eyebrow for approximate size. Try the helmet on to ensure it fits your head comfortably without rocking to the side. Sizing pads can be used to adjust the fit to your head shape. Mix or match the sizing pads to get the best fit. The helmet should sit level on the head so that the forehead is covered down to just above the eyebrow—this is called "the halo effect."

Center the left buckle under the chin. On most helmets, the straps can be pulled from the back of the helmet to lengthen or shorten the chin straps. This task is easier if you take the helmet off to make the adjustments. Adjust the slider on both straps to form a "V" shape under, and slightly in front of the ears. Roll the rubber band towards the slider. Buckle up! Starting loose, while holding the buckle, pull the strap tight. No more than one finger should fit under the strap. All four straps must go through the rubber band and be close to the buckle to prevent the buckle from slipping.

Helmet Fit Test

Open your mouth wide … like a big yawn. The helmet should pull down on the head. Does your helmet rock back more than two fingers above the eyebrows? If so, unbuckle, shorten the front strap by moving the slider forward. Buckle, retighten the chin strap, and test again. Does your helmet rock forward into your eyes? If so, unbuckle and tighten the back strap by moving the slider back toward the ear. Buckle, retighten the chin strap, and test again. You should not get movement when you push/pull your helmet forward, backward, or from side to side. Keep making adjustments until you have a nice snug fit.

Look for the Labels:

Look for a bike helmet with labels that:

- Have the date of manufacture. This information will be helpful in case the helmet is recalled
- Say U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC)1 certified. That label means that the helmet has been tested for safety, and meets the federal safety standard.

Some bike helmets may also have a label stating that they are ASTM2, Snell3, or ANSI4 certified. These labels let you know that the helmet has also passed the safety tests of these organizations.

When to Replace a Bike Helmet:

Replace any bike helmet that is damaged or has been involved in a crash. Bike helmets are designed to help protect the rider's brain and head from one serious impact, such as a fall onto the pavement. You may not be able to see the damage to the foam, but the foam materials in the helmet will crush after an impact. That means that the foam in the helmet won't be able to help protect the rider's brain and head from another impact.

Multi-Use Helmets: Some helmet companies have created multi-use helmets for biking, skateboarding, and other activities. Multi-use helmets are designed to withstand multiple very minor hits; however, a multi-use helmet MUST be replaced if it has been involved in a serious crash, or if it is damaged. Before using a multiuse helmet for biking, make sure the helmet has a CPSC label certifying it for biking.