



Cycling Apparel

The biggest question that new riders ask is how do I know what I need in terms of cycling clothes? There are literally hundreds of different pieces of apparel you can wear as a cyclist. However, there are just a few items that are central to a cyclist's wardrobe.

Shorts

The simplest place to begin is the short. Cycling shorts are special for a variety of reasons, and when looking at cycling shorts there are a couple of important things to take into consideration.

- They should fit snugly so that when you pedal there isn't any material that can rub against your skin, causing chaffing and potentially tearing your skin apart. Yes, that means you will be wearing spandex!
- Flat seams. That means there is little or no extra material on the inside of the short that sticks out and rubs against your skin.
- Long enough to ensure that your skin is protected from the saddle, bike frame and even each other when you pedal up and down.
- A high quality pad in the crotch. This little wonder can be your best friend. At first it may feel odd, but later you will be thankful for the comfort it provides. The thickness and size is mostly a personal preference but in general it should be of sufficient size and shape to fit your body type.

One very important note relative to cycling shorts is that they are meant to be worn as is. In other words, *you don't wear any underwear with them*. You heard correctly, you just pull them on and go. To some, this will seem odd at first, but there is nothing more self defeating to the whole purpose of the shorts than to add a layer of clothing underneath them and in the process provide an additional item that can rub you raw.

Jersey

The second basic piece of clothing is the jersey. Jerseys come in a variety of forms.

- Zippers - Some have a full zipper while others may only have a $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$, or even $\frac{3}{4}$. Although full zip jerseys cost a little more they are worth it because they are easier to get on and off and allow for better ventilation and can be easier to shed in either the heat or cold.
- Pockets - Typically there are three pockets across the lower back of the jersey. Since cycling shorts don't have any pockets the jersey picks up the



slack. The pockets are to allow you to carry crucial items with you when you ride, and are deep enough to fit a small water bottle, food, phone and other items.

- Fit - Jerseys should be worn snugly. The correct fit will have minimum amount of wrinkles and it does not flap in the wind while you ride.

Often, new cyclists go purchase a jersey much the same way they do regular street clothes. A baggy jersey may feel comfortable but in reality it acts like a sail in the wind slowing you down and making it harder to ride your bike. It also will rub up against your skin and cause the same kind of chaffing that a poor fitting pair of shorts may do. Keep it snug and you will be much more comfortable in the long run.

A good jersey will have many similar features as good shorts. Look for high quality materials, flat seams and a good quality zipper.

Gloves

Gloves are an essential piece of cycling gear that some people tend to dismiss. However, this can be a mistake. **Gloves serve two purposes:**

- Padding - they provide some extra padding and comfort for your hands
- Protection - many cyclists will instinctually reach out with their hands to break their fall, and the palms of your hands become vulnerable to significant damage. Once the palms are injured, the next few rides can become painful or slow down the healing process. Gloves help avoid this situation.

Gloves come in all different shapes and sizes.

- Fingers - The typical cycling glove is fingerless but some riders choose to wear full fingered gloves.
- Padding - Good gloves will have a reinforced palm and be constructed of high quality materials that permit the rider a full range of motion to be capable of operating all the controls of the bike.
- Backing - Many riders like gloves that have a smooth back with softer materials that can be used to wipe sweat from one's face with some degree of comfort.

Gloves made of rough or coarse materials or that have numerous exposed seams can be uncomfortable and downright annoying.

Glasses

Glasses = eye safety. Every cyclist should invest in a high quality pair of sunglasses that protect against sunlight and objects that may be kicked up off the road damaging your eyes.



- Multiple lenses that can be easily changed so that no matter what the light conditions you can change the lenses out. For instance, when it is cloudy or rainy out you will want a yellow or even clear lens that allows you to see in lower light conditions.
- Polarized – going from bright sun into a shaded area with glasses that do not allow the eye to adjust, can cause a rider to miss road debris that might not be seen in a shaded area.
- Glasses should be put on after the helmet as opposed to before where the glasses are tucked underneath the straps. The glasses should fall off the face easily in case of a crash to reduce the risk of injury to the face.

Beyond this, the style, fit and color are all a matter of personal preference.

Socks

Light weight, breathable socks are essential to your on-bike comfort.

- Avoid thick cotton socks as they are hot and can be very uncomfortable.
- Breathable – so your socks dry faster and keep moisture off your feet. In the cold this will keep you warmer and in the heat this will avoid discomfort and the development of athlete's foot and related fungal/bacterial problems.
- In colder months, socks also provide the insulation and extra warmth you need. Wool can provide warmth and breathability.

Numerous companies make socks specifically for cycling and others have begun producing them for other sports as well because they offer a significant amount of comfort.

Shoes

Many new cyclists assume that they can wear about any kind of athletic shoe and be OK. However, a good cycling shoe is not the same as an everyday athletic shoe.

Shoes used for cycling will have a rigid sole that allows you to:

- transmit power to the pedals
- protect your foot from injury that may result from only part of the foot being engaged with the pedal.

Clipped Shoes (and pedals) – specific for cycling

As riders advance in the sport they will likely move from normal flat pedals to a dedicated clipped pedal system which will necessitate changing over to special shoes that will accommodate the corresponding cleats that work in conjunction with the chosen pedal system. The benefits of a clipped shoe and pedal system are:

- Power transfer – with your feet attached you have a better connection to the pedal and much firmer platform to push down on the pedals. This will help you to get more power into every pedal stroke and ultimately go further/faster.



- Use of your entire leg-with your feet clipped in you have the ability to not only push down, but pull up on the pedals. Learning to pedal perfect circles will make you a more effective and efficient cyclist.

Helmet

This is the single most important piece of equipment you will buy.

When you purchase a helmet be sure to get one that fits properly. It needs to be:

- Meet minimum government standards for cycling helmets;
- Snug and not move around on your head; and,
- should sit level with the chin strap fastened securely.

A loose fitting helmet with a strap dangling an inch or two beneath your chin can be a liability. Find a good quality helmet and ask your local shop for some help ensuring it fits correctly.

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