Bike Safety Basics

Helmet Fit & Adjustment

A Lesson on Lids

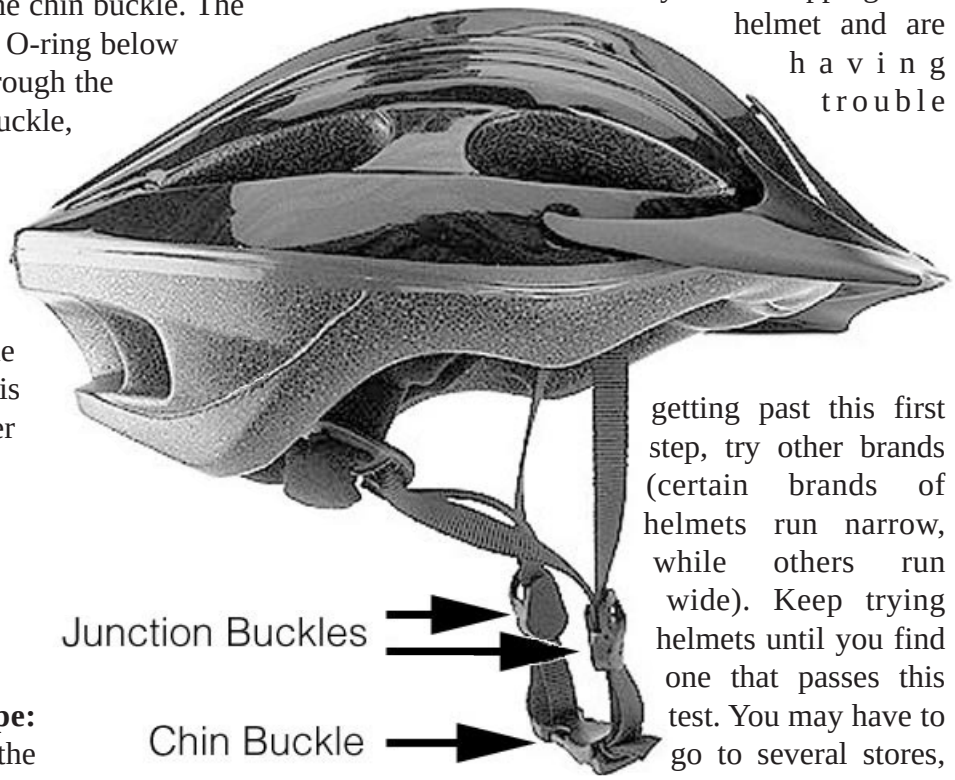
Introduction

Helmets can reduce the incidence and severity of injury and may even save a cyclist's life. They can only do so, however, if properly sized, adjusted and consistently worn. This guide will help you to purchase a helmet that fits you and to adjust it so that it can do its job properly.

If you already have a helmet, go through the steps in this pamphlet to ensure that the helmet is correctly sized and adjusted. Helmets need periodic readjustment, so keep this guide at home as a handy reference.

Helmet Anatomy

Regardless of the brand, modern bicycle helmets usually have one pair of straps per side of the head. Each pair of straps go through "junction buckles" and then continue down to a quick-release "chin buckle" comprised of a male piece and a female piece. Often there is a rubber O-ring around the straps on the side of the helmet with the male half of the chin buckle. The straps pass through the O-ring below the junction buckle, through the male half of the chin buckle, and then back up through the O-ring again. The O-ring is only a convenience — it holds the straps out of the way when the helmet is worn — and is not necessary for proper helmet function.



4 Steps to Proper Helmet Fit

1) **Helmet Size/Shape:** Right out of the box, the helmet should fit your head shape. Ignoring the straps for now, simply place the helmet on your head. Make sure the helmet is level and not tilted up, down, or to either side (if it is not level, the adjustment of the straps and the helmet's effectiveness may be affected).

The helmet should sit completely on your head, as opposed to riding on top. Wiggle the helmet around a little. It should not sit like a big bucket on your head — there should not be significant side-to-side or front-to-back play. If the helmet doesn't pass this preliminary test it will not work properly, so get another one as soon as possible.

If you are shopping for a helmet and are having trouble getting past this first step, try other brands (certain brands of helmets run narrow, while others run wide). Keep trying helmets until you find one that passes this test. You may have to go to several stores, but be persistent — proper helmet fit is important for your safety and it is time well spent.

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2) Adjusting the junction buckles: Ignoring the chin buckle for now, adjust each pair of straps so that the junction buckles are situated just below your earlobes (not in front or behind them, and not on your jawbones or the soft tissue under them). Look closely to see where slack needs to be taken up or where more slack is needed in order to get the junction buckles directly under the earlobes.

3) Adjusting the chin buckle: Before heading through the male side of the chin buckle, the straps on that side of the helmet often go through an O-ring. They return through the O-ring after threading through the male chin buckle piece. The O-ring can complicate achieving proper helmet adjustment, so for now, remove the straps from their return-trip back up through the O-ring (they should still go through it on their way down to the male side of the chin buckle).

Close the chin buckle and adjust the straps so that the chin buckle is roughly centered in the soft tissue under the jawbones. Note that if the chin buckle must be moved significantly, you may have to go back to Step 2. Also note that the straps must be routed through the male part of chin buckle a certain way in order for it to work properly. When buckled, one should be able to pull the strap tighter, yet it should not be able to loosen by itself. If it does, take the strap completely out of the male piece, flip it over and reroute the strap. Test it again.

4) Final adjustment: When the chin buckle is engaged, all straps should be snug against the head. If any of the straps aren't snug, readjust them now, keeping in mind the previous steps. When the helmet is properly adjusted, you should be able to slip a finger under the straps, but they should snap back into position when you remove your finger. Do a final check of the helmet fit by gently yet firmly trying to push it off your head from the front, back and the sides. The helmet should remain in place and secured on your head. If the helmet is easy to push off towards the back of your head, tighten the forward straps (above the juntion buckle).

In a crash your head will likely impact with significant force. If the helmet is easy to push off, yet all straps are properly adjusted well, try another model and/or make of helmet. If all is well, route the proper straps back through the O-ring. Don't forget to periodically check the adjustment of your helmet.
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Other Helmet Notes:

• Helmets range in price from $20 to $120. As long as a helmet is Snell, ANSI or ASTM certified (look for a sticker inside the helmet), and it can be properly adjusted, it will likely perform its job well. Other factors affecting the cost of a helmet are weight, venting, accessories (such as visor) and style. If the only helmet that fits you is expensive, buy it! It is a small price to pay for your safety or a loved one's.

• Store your helmet away from sunlight as ultraviolet light will prematurely age it.

• Bicycle helmets are designed to withstand one crash only. Structural damage is not always visible, so always replace a helmet that has been in a crash and never buy used helmets.

• Several companies will replace crashed helmets for less than the full retail price. Remember to register with the company to be eligible.

• Your helmet can help prevent crashes by making you more visible. Light or fluorescent colored helmets and helmets with reflective tape are the easiest for motorists to see at night. Bike shops usually sell reflective tape that can be applied to any helmet to make it more visible.

• You can never tell when a crash might occur, so wear your helmet every time you ride, no matter how short the trip.

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