

# Older Adult Cycling Guide

**Your guide to discovering how biking  
can help you lead an active, vibrant and  
healthy life regardless of age.**

*First Edition 2025*



# Biking is for all ages, abilities and incomes

Bicycles, in a range of adaptive forms, provide an efficient, affordable and enjoyable way to get around. Whether you're getting started for the first time or getting back into cycling after a long period, this guide will help you discover how biking in Toronto can improve your physical and mental health, keep you independent, and lower your transportation costs.

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# MYTH: Biking is for kids and the young

**Fact:** Age is no barrier to cycling—it's a fun, accessible way for older adults to stay mobile, connected, and healthy, whether for daily activities or leisure.

**Fact:** People who commute via active modes of transportation such as biking and walking are happier and more likely to get the daily movement they need to be healthy.

In 2021, just 38% of Torontonians 65 years or over met the recommended 150 minutes of weekly physical activity introduced by the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines. (Statistics Canada)

For older adults, cycling can make it easier to reach these activity goals which will benefit overall health and wellbeing.



Councillor Dianne Saxe (72 years old) and Mayor Olivia Chow (67 years old) both ride to work. They are seen here with their bikes at the kick off to Toronto's Bike Month in 2023. Photo credit: Alison Stewart

# Benefits of cycling for older adults

Bicycles are a practical mobility device that can support people's various transportation needs as they age. The growth of e-bikes and the growing variety of adaptive bikes has made cycling at an older age more accessible than ever.

## **Physical and Mental Health**

Regular exercise plays a crucial role in maintaining good health, especially as people age. Cycling is a great low-impact exercise for older adults because it strengthens muscles and joints while improving balance and coordination, which reduces the risk of falls. Biking also boosts cardiovascular health, enhances mental clarity and eases symptoms of depression.

## **Social Connectedness**

Cycling enhances cognitive function, boosts memory, and improves visual-spatial processing. Biking fosters connections between the rider and the outer environment. Biking also creates new social interactions, whether through bike clubs, casual rides with friends, or by simple encounters made while out on a ride.



A woman enjoying a break after a social ride in Scarborough.  
Photo credit: Cycle Toronto

### **Improves the quality and affordability of life**

Research shows that people of all ages, particularly women, experience a profound sense of joy and freedom when cycling. Aside from helping older adults maintain their independence and age in place, biking helps prevent social isolation by creating opportunities for social interaction. It also cultivates a sense of community and belonging. Biking is also an affordable way to get around.

# Getting started

Biking in Toronto has never been easier. The city's cycling network is expanding and includes a range of bikeways, multi-use trails and cycle tracks. Before heading outside for a bike ride, it is important to take measures to be safe and be informed about the rules of the road.

## Biking essentials to keep you safe

1. **Helmets** are highly recommended for all riders but must be worn when using e-assist bikes.
2. **Bicycle lights** (front and back), reflective tape, and a working bell or horn are required by law - and they are essential to keep you visible and heard by other road users.
3. **The ABC checklist:**
  - Air: Check tires for enough air and ensure wheels spin freely.
  - Brakes and Bars: Make sure brakes are working and handlebars are stable.
  - Chain: Check the chain is tight and lubricated.
4. **Communicate with other road users** by using hand signals, your bell or calling out.
5. **Familiarize yourself with the rules of the road: The Highway Traffic Act (HTA)** outlines the rules for all road users. Bicycles are treated as vehicles.

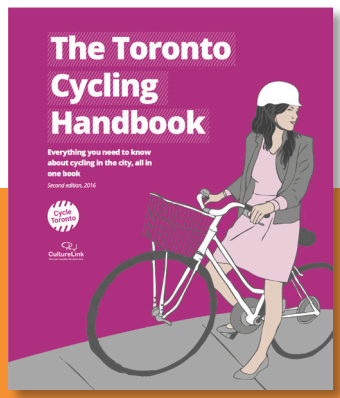
Cyclists have a legal right to:

  - Occupy the lane closest to the road in the absence of cycling infrastructure.
  - A one meter buffer from motorists and the curb (it is unsafe to ride too closely to the road's edge).

# Protecting your joints with good bicycle fit

1. **Seat Height:** Adjust the seat to allow a slight knee bend when the pedal is at its lowest point. You should be able to touch the ground with your toes.
2. **Handlebar Height:** Keep the handlebars high enough to maintain an upright position, reducing strain on your back and neck.
3. **Step-Through Frame:** Low step-through frames make mounting and dismounting easier.
4. **Wide Handlebars & Tires:** Wider handlebars provide more stability, while wide tires offer a more balanced and stable ride.
5. **Comfortable Saddle:** Choose a cushioned saddle that supports longer, more comfortable rides.

**Check out our Toronto Cyclists Handbook at [cycleto.ca](http://cycleto.ca) to ensure you're familiar with all the essential tips and rules for cycling in the city.**



# Bike Share Toronto

The City of Toronto's publicly funded bike rental program, Bike Share Toronto, connects residents to bikes without the need for storage or maintenance.

By 2025, Bike Share Toronto's growing network will include 10,000 bikes (including e-assist bikes) and 1,000 stations covering every ward in Toronto. For many Torontonians, Bike Share has been their introduction to biking, helping them discover how convenient it is.

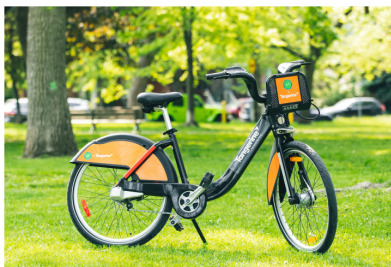


Photo credit: City of Toronto

**Convenient Locations + Affordability = a great way to connect to transit, libraries and grocery stores.**

**Bike Share offers affordable annual memberships as well as low income passes for tenants of Toronto Community Housing or recipients of Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). For more details, visit [bikesharetoronto.com](https://bikesharetoronto.com)**



# Types of bikes and their riders

**There are various types of bikes and adaptive designs that cater to older adults.**

**Pedal Assist E-bikes** provide electric assistance while pedaling, making cycling less physically demanding, especially on inclines, when carrying heavier loads, or traveling longer distances. While many models resemble regular bikes, e-bikes have a built-in motor that provides extra boost. E-bikes must be speed limited to 32 km/h in Ontario.

E-bikes are heavier than standard bikes and their batteries require regular charging and occasional maintenance. They are also more expensive and need to be well secured so they are not stolen.

**Note:** Before purchasing an e-bike, it is recommended the battery meets

standard UL or CE requirements, and there is no physical damage to the battery case or warranty seal.

Not all electric mobility devices are e-bikes, and classifications vary by jurisdiction. Faster and more powerful electric mopeds and motorcycles that don't require pedaling are currently not classified as bicycles in Ontario.



*Image of an electric moped in Toronto. Photo credit: Igal Cano*

**Upright step-through bikes** are designed for comfort and ease of use. The low frame offers easy mounting for a range of riders. Their upright riding position promotes better spine alignment and reduces strain on the back and joints, making these bikes a great choice for older adults seeking a comfortable and accessible way to cycle.

Jacky, 72 years old, rides an upright e-assist bike to get around. "As an osteoarthritis sufferer with four artificial joints to prove it, my pedal-assist e-bike gave me confidence and allowed me to return to cycling for my transportation and recreational needs. Although I've never been a speedy cyclist, overtaking younger cyclists while going uphill is so much fun!"



*Photo source: Jacky*



*Photo credit: Alison Stewart*

**Adult trikes & e-trikes:** Tricycles offer more stability with three wheels and are ideal for older adults with balance concerns. E-assisted trikes are also an option.

**Considerations:** Trikes are less stable when making sharp turns, at higher speeds or navigating uneven terrain. Trikes require more room for storage compared to traditional bikes.

**Peter, 68 years old, rides a variety of bikes including this e-assist cargo bike for hauling bigger loads:** "Like many, I grew up biking as a child but as a teen wanted to drive. It was upon entering the workforce that I discovered how stressful commuting by car in the city is, which is how, in 1992, I began biking to get around."



*Photo credit: Alison Stewart*

**Recumbent trikes:** Recumbent trikes are very comfortable due to their reclined seating position which reduces strain on the back and joints.

**Considerations:** Recumbents are lower to the ground and are less visible in traffic, so it is advisable to use flags and be well lit to make one's presence seen.

**Shahnaz, 58 years old, rides an e-recumbent trike.** "I was born with a birth condition which developed into a chronic kidney disease that leaves me perpetually exhausted. Riding my recumbent gives me the energy and exercise I need that allows me to participate in life by volunteering for Bike Brigade and other community delivery meal programs. I also go on long distance cycling trips in the summer."





*Photo source: Janet*

**Folding bikes** are a practical solution for those with limited storage space or who rely on multi-modal trips since they can be brought on the TTC and GO trains. These are also available with e-assist for added ease.

**Janet, 67 years old, rides a foldable bike.** "Because of Toronto's cycling network, I am able to live car-free and began delivering food and essentials to community members in need during the pandemic. I have since made over 640 deliveries across the city. I have never been in such great shape and love changing people's minds about what can be carried on a bike.



*Photo source: Douglas*

**Road bikes:** Traditional road bikes are designed for speed and long distance rides which make them lighter.

**Douglas, 72 years old, rides a road bike everyday, for leisure and transportation:** "Riding a bike has helped me to stay healthy and active. I cycle for transportation and recreation, and have saved thousands of

dollars by reducing my car use. When I'm on a bike, I'm more connected to the people and world around me. My life is better and healthier because I bike."



Photo source: Steve

### Hybrid and e-hybrid bikes:

Hybrid bikes are versatile bikes that accommodate a range of different road surfaces and terrain. They tend to be lighter than step-through commuter style bikes, but are comfortable because they have shocks that absorb bumpy country roads and potholes.

### Steve, 71 years old, uses a hybrid bike to get around in Scarborough:

"I was an occasional weekend cyclist until I turned 60 and participated in the annual Bike to Work ride, as part of the annual kick off to Toronto's Bike Month. This inspired me to leave my car in the driveway and bike to work regularly. Now retired I continue to enjoy biking for my daily needs."

**Bike Month is an opportunity for people to try riding a bike for the first time, learn new skills, or simply have fun and connect with new people. Find out more at [Bikemonth.ca](https://www.bikemonth.ca)**

# Building confidence and going for a ride

**Fast fact:** Studies indicate that one of the biggest barriers to getting older adults on a bike is a lack of confidence. Whenever people take on something new it can be nerve wracking. By practicing and taking some precautions, anyone can join the growing population of people who bike.

**Start Small** - begin with short, flat rides along multi-use paths like the Martin Goodman Trail to build confidence and endurance.

**Practice in a car-free space such as a park** - build your confidence by getting comfortable without the fear of mixing with traffic or falling on concrete.

**Get support and join a community group** - Toronto has many organizations and programs designed to support older adults. Whether you're just starting or returning to cycling, these groups will help you build confidence, stay active, and connect with others.

**Visit [cycletoronto.ca](https://cycletoronto.ca) to access resources and essential tips for cycling safely and confidently in the city.**



# Tips for Preventing Injuries

**As with any form of exercise, it is important to take precautions to reduce muscle strains or injury.**

1. **Relax and loosen up**  
Before riding, gently move your arms, shoulders, and neck to release tension and increase flexibility.
2. **Balance**  
Practice exercises that improve balance. Maintaining balance will improve stability and reduce the possibility of injury when falling. While riding, keep your head and shoulders stable to maintain control and prevent falls.
3. **Protect your joints**  
Engage your core so that you are not overusing your arms and palms to support your body. This reduces strain on your wrists, elbows, and shoulders.
4. **Minimize fall impact**  
If you feel like you're about to fall, aim for softer ground, or away from traffic, to reduce the severity of the impact. Aim for a rolling fall to disperse the force of an abrupt fall.
5. **Listen to your body**  
If you feel achy and are feeling unstable or unable to get up on your own, do not force yourself to move (unless you are in the middle of a path or traffic lane). Seek help from anyone nearby or call 911 for help.

# Choosing the best route

The city's growing cycling infrastructure, combined with multi-use trails and ravines, creates an excellent system for cyclists. Here are a few tips and resources to help you plan your rides.

## **Pick streets with bike lanes or quiet residential routes**

Look for streets that have dedicated bike lanes to ensure a safer and more comfortable ride.

## **Avoid major streets when possible**

Opt for quieter residential streets or trails to avoid heavy traffic.

## **Avoid busy intersections and highways**

Plan your route to steer clear of major crossings or highways. Use bike-friendly underpasses or pedestrian crossings where available.

## **Opt for multi-use paths and scenic routes**

Toronto is full of beautiful ravine trails and waterfront paths. These areas often have less traffic and are perfect for leisure rides.

**The Toronto Cycling Map is a free map offered by the City of Toronto that includes all the bikeways in the city to help plan your bike rides. You can get a copy at libraries, community centres and at Cycle Toronto engagement stations.**

# Community cycling groups

**Cycle Toronto** is a member-supported charity that works to make Toronto a healthy, safe and vibrant cycling city for all. We are focused on advocacy, education and encouragement, as we work to shape policy, infrastructure, and build community to transform our city's cycling culture.  
[cycleto.ca](http://cycleto.ca)

**Toronto East Cyclists** is a volunteer run group that was created in 2010 to promote and celebrate safe cycling in Scarborough Southwest and across Scarborough.  
[torontoeastcyclists.ca](http://torontoeastcyclists.ca)

**Cycling Without Age Canada (CWACA)** is a national organization that leads positive social change in partnership with local chapters to enhance the quality of life for Canadians one bicycle ride at a time. They offer volunteer-driven rides on specially designed trishaws to provide both mobility and connection.  
[cyclingwithoutage.ca](http://cyclingwithoutage.ca)

**Scarborough Cycles** was launched in 2015 and is now a program of Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services in partnership with the City of Toronto. They run three community bike hubs and offer learn-to-ride programs and community rides.  
[scarboroughcycles.ca](http://scarboroughcycles.ca)

This guide has been developed with the collaboration of many.

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