



# PORTLAND **FAMILY BIKING** GUIDE



A how-to manual for  
all stages of family biking



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# Biking While Pregnant

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Biking during pregnancy can be a great way to help curb nausea, improve energy levels, and maintain an active lifestyle. Of course, every pregnancy and every woman is different. Here are a few things to keep in mind if you're considering biking during your pregnancy:

## Check with your doctor

Make sure biking during pregnancy is a healthy choice for you, and that your doctor agrees.

## Consider your route

Does your journey take you on any streets with lots of car traffic and high speeds? Re-routing your ride to streets with fewer cars or designated bike lanes can reduce ride stress.

## Consider your comfort

Adjusting your bike to support a more upright riding position, or investing in a new comfort bike, can help increase your comfort and riding confidence as your body changes.

## Listen to your body

You know your body best, so be sure to listen to it. Today might be a better day to bus in or take the MAX.

A quick online search will lead to a fair amount of information about biking while pregnant. A good place to start is the Family Biking Guide from the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition. They offer multiple pages of in-depth advice.

**[sfbike.org/family](https://sfbike.org/family)**



# Biking with Babies (0-12 months)

There are few standards available regarding biking with a baby nine months or younger. If you are ready to give it a try, we suggest looking up options and advice online, or asking friends and families already riding with infants. Here are a few things to consider before you start:

**Neck strength:** Until your baby is able to hold her head up on her own, she shouldn't be carried in an upright bike seat. Adequate neck strength usually won't occur until nine months or later.

**Helmets:** There aren't many infant-sized helmets currently available on the market, and wearing a helmet during this stage of growth while in a car seat can be damaging to an infant's neck and spine. That said, Oregon law states any child under 16 must be wearing a helmet while on a bicycle (ORS 814.485).

## Carrying options

**Cargo box bikes** or **trailers** compatible with car seats.

Some cargo box bikes and bike trailers have the option of strapping an infant-sized car seat into their infrastructure.



## Loading / unloading your bike:

**Never leave your bike unattended with your child in a bike seat!** A double-sided kickstand can assist in stabilizing during loading and unloading, but always keep a hand on the bike during the process.

## Head support:

Bike rides tend to lull children to sleep. Make sure her head and neck have enough support when she nods off.

## Accessories:

Various brands offer accessories for seats like rain/element covers, handlebars, headrests, adjustable footrests and more.

# Biking with Toddlers (1-3 Years)

Once your child can sit up without falling, hold her head up on her own, and fit into a helmet, she is most likely ready to ride in a front- or rear-mounted bike seat, cargo box bike or trailer.

## Carrying options

### FRONT-MOUNTED SEATS

Typically have lower weight limits, so these work best as an option up to age three. Allows you to see what your toddler is up to while riding. Can attach to your bike stem or frame.



### REAR-MOUNTED SEATS

Typically have higher weight limits, so you can use them longer than a front-mounted version. Conversations with your child are still possible, but you lose the ability to see what they are up to while you ride. Attaching a rear rack on your bike is necessary before attaching a rear-mounted seat.



### CARGO BOX BIKES

After your child can sit well (usually after 12 months) she may be ready to ride in a seated position in the box of a cargo bike. Shorter legs may require props under her feet for support. Cargo box bikes have lots of extra room for your family gear.



### TRAILERS

Trailers can easily attach to your bike and don't demand much change to your current set-up. It is not as easy to chat with your child while riding, but she will have good coverage from the elements and can nap easily. There's also lots of room for extra cargo.



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## Take a test ride

Be sure to first try out whatever carrying option you choose without your child to make sure you feel comfortable with the added weight and ensure everything is properly attached. As the adult, test rides are good places to make sure your knees or heels don't bump front- or rear-mounted seats, and to practice mounting and dismounting.

## What to expect from your child

Depending on your toddler's temperament, she may take some time getting used to biking. It also may be a struggle to get your child to wear a helmet, but she will likely forget it's on once the bike is moving. Eventually, a helmet will be accepted as a required riding tool and your child will be reminding *you* to put yours on.



Children nearing two and older are usually ready to try their hand at riding a bike. See *Your Child's First Wheels* in the next *Biking With Pre-Schoolers* section.

# Biking with Pre-Schoolers (3-5 Years)

If you're using a front-mounted seat, it will probably be time to move to a rear-mounted seat, assuming your child is near the weight limit. Rear-mounted seats, trailers and cargo box bikes are still good travel options with toddlers (see page 3), but as they move past age three, there are additional set-ups to consider.

## Carrying options

In order to advance to any of the following pre-schooler options, your child will need to stay awake for the whole ride AND sit safely on a bike **without restraints**. Keep your first rides shorter so everyone can get used to the new set-up.

### TAG-ALONGS OR TRAILERCYCLES

Tow your child on a one-wheeled bike that attaches to the seat post of your bike. It gives your child the option of pedaling or just coasting along for the ride.



### BIKE TOW BAR / TANDEM COUPLING

Tow your child and her full, two-wheeled bicycle behind yours with a tow bar or tandem coupling, or unhook and let your child ride by herself.



### LONG TAIL BIKES

Rear-mounted seats, backrests, and handlebars can all be attached on this bike's back extension for multiple child and cargo carrying options.



### TANDEM

There are multiple styles of family tandems available with possibilities of children pedaling in front or back and in upright or reclining seat positions.



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## Riding with two or more children

Here's where you can get creative. Look around online or ask your local bike shop about riding with multiple children. Chances are you've already got some experience riding with one child and have a good idea of what works best for your family. Combinations of many products already mentioned should do the trick.

## Your child's first wheels

Toddlers around two years and older are often ready to begin biking on their own. Start your child on a balance bike or a bike with training wheels to build confidence before she starts pedaling independently.

### BALANCE BIKES

Small bikes without pedals or training wheels teach the fundamentals of balancing and steering a bike. Sitting upright with feet flat on the ground helps your child feel more comfortable and steady as she begins learning to balance.



### TRAINING WHEELS

Training wheels help a bicycle stay upright while your child learns to pedal and begin maintaining balance. Gradually raise the training wheels as your child becomes more proficient at riding, then remove them once she's gotten the hang of it. Consider playing a game where she rides as far as she can without the training wheels touching the ground.



### RIDING PRACTICE

Try out new riding skills in car-free places like parks, multi-use paths or events like Sunday Parkways. Practice safety skills early by staying to the right and teaching awareness of other path users.

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## Making your own balance bike

Lower the seat and remove the pedals of another small youth bike and Voila! you've created your own balance bike (a local bike shop can assist with those adjustments if you don't have the tools).

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# Biking to School

Making the shift from casual riding to commuting can seem big and mysterious, but it gets easier once you've tried it a few times and created your own routine. Biking to school is an excellent way to get there quickly while spending quality time with your children.

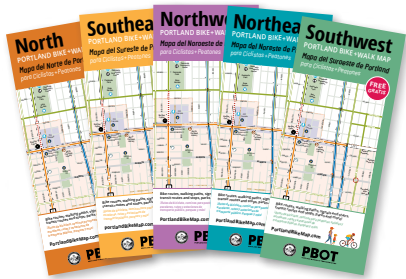
## Find a route

Choosing appropriate routes for your bike trips can make your rides safer, more pleasant, and more kid-friendly. The route you normally drive usually isn't the best route by bike. Find trip planning assistance here:

### PORTLAND BIKE MAPS

The City of Portland offers five free neighborhood bike/walk maps and a citywide bike map. Order them online or pick one up at your local bike shop.

[portlandoregon.gov/transportation/at](http://portlandoregon.gov/transportation/at)



### PORTLAND'S NEIGHBORHOOD GREENWAYS

A number of quiet local streets have route signs and markings to help bicyclists find their way. They often connect directly with neighborhood schools and parks. Use our free Portland bike maps to plan your route and find a neighborhood greenway near you.



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## Kids on your bike

When commuting with kids on your bike, there are a few things to think about to make your trip a little easier:

### PLAN AHEAD

Dropping your child off and continuing on to work usually includes figuring where to leave her helmet, how to haul your gear, and more. Planning ahead and surveying the drop-off scene at school can be helpful. Turning this plan into a regular routine can also make mornings less stressful.

### BE PREPARED (BRING SNACKS!)

Similar to traveling with your child by any other mode, be prepared for whatever the weather might bring when packing apparel and accessories. Having snacks on hand when you show up after daycare or school can make the ride home more enjoyable.

### TEACH STREET SAFETY SKILLS

Riding together is a great time to talk about what stop signs, road markings, or other traffic controls mean when on a bike, or narrating subtle biking skills/practices like *"I'm slowing because that's a blind corner."* This will make your job easier later on when teaching your child to bike independently.

## Kids riding independently

### ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND BEYOND

The graduation from simply being able to ride with ease (braking, turning, navigating hills) to being confident with street rules takes a lot of practice and diligence. When practicing on quiet streets or sidewalks, ride or walk alongside your child and talk about street rules with an emphasis on safety.

### FIVE IMPORTANT SKILLS TO MAKE SURE EVERYONE IS CONFIDENT

**Street and traffic safety**, especially around crossings and driveways; this includes watching for cars, understanding right of way, and more

**Riding predictably** in a straight line

**Looking back** without swerving

**Stopping** and speed control, especially on hills

**Riding on uneven and varied surfaces**, especially gravel

### PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Before you begin riding to school, practice your route on a weekend morning when traffic is usually lighter. This can help gauge your travel time and also how well your child is prepared for riding in the streets.

## START SMALL

Neither you nor your child may be ready to jump into daily bike commuting. Start by riding once a week or on late-start days until you are both ready for more.

## SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

Safe Routes to School offers encouragement programs and bike safety education to help support walking and rolling to school. Participate in one of the following events or programs to help you and your student get excited about biking!



**Bike Trains:** Groups of students riding to school with one or more adult chaperones. Designated routes allow students to join in anywhere along the way. More than one = fun!

**International Walk+Bike to School Day:** Join students and families across the globe every October to celebrate getting to school in an active, healthy way!

**Walk+Bike Challenge Month:** Oregon students can challenge other classes, schools, or their faculty to see who can walk or roll to school more often in May.

Find out more about Portland's Safe Routes to School programs online at [saferoutesportland.org](http://saferoutesportland.org), or by calling 503-823-1171.



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## SIDEWALK RIDING

Riding on the sidewalk can be a great place for younger children to learn bike skills, and can often seem safer than riding in the street. However, driveways and intersection crossings can be dangerous.

**Here are a few things you can teach your child to improve their safety on the sidewalk:**

**Go SLOW:** A slower pace is a safer pace.

**Check every intersection and driveway:** People driving are used to pulling all the way up to the street before stopping and may not stop to look for people riding or walking on the sidewalk or in the intersection. Small people are particularly difficult to see when there are visual barriers such as vegetation and other vehicles.

**Only cross the street at crosswalks:** Just like a pedestrian, cross where cars will most expect to see someone.

**Yield to people walking:** Be courteous when passing — it's their terrain!

**The Law:** Oregon law (ORS 814.410) permits bicycles to ride on the sidewalk under the same rights as a pedestrian so long as they operate in a safe manner and travel at a walking pace.

## UNSAFE BEHAVIOR TO AVOID INCLUDES:

Darting into traffic

Riding at higher speeds than an ordinary walk

Failing to audibly warn a pedestrian when passing them

Not yielding to pedestrians

Endangering any person or property with careless riding behavior

# Helmets

**Any youth in Oregon under the age of 16 is required to wear a helmet when riding a bike (ORS 814.485).**

As legal guardian of your child, if you carry a child under 16 years old on a bicycle when they are not wearing a helmet, you will be held legally responsible (ORS 814.486).

A person is exempt from both ORS 814.485 and 814.486 if wearing the protective headgear would violate a religious belief or practice of the person.

**Helmets only work if worn correctly. Avoid these common mistakes when fitting your child's helmet.**

**Tilted:** Your child's helmet should be level on her head, about a two finger width above her eyebrows.



**Loose Straps:** Straps should be snug against your child's chin, with just enough space available for one or two fingers to fit.



**Proper fit:** Adjust the buckles on the side straps so they form a "V" underneath the ears.



**Does your child's helmet move when she shakes her head?** If so, try one or more of the following.

- **Readjust** the chin and side straps
- **Tighten** with an internal adjuster sometimes found at the back of the helmet
- **Attach** the foam pads that generally come with a new helmet to make the fit more snug.

**A helmet lasts only one crash!** Replace a helmet if it is over five years old or has any visible damage. Cracks in the styrofoam or missing bits of styrofoam are signs the helmet should be replaced.

A house rule requiring helmets worn when riding on **any** personal wheels can set expectations early on. Adults set a good example by always wearing a helmet when biking.

# Resources

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## Portland Safe Routes to School

A partnership of the City of Portland, schools, neighborhoods, community organizations and agencies, Portland's Safe Routes to School program continues to increase safety and improve health for students and their families.

**[saferoutesportland.org](http://saferoutesportland.org)**

**503-823-1171**

**[saferoutes@portlandoregon.gov](mailto:saferoutes@portlandoregon.gov)**

## Low-cost carrying options

Purchasing used bike seats, trailers, or children's bikes on Craigslist can help cut costs.

**[portland.craigslist.org](http://portland.craigslist.org)**

## Low-cost helmets

Legacy Emanuel's *Trauma Nurses Talk Tough* program provides below-retail cost helmets at events in the Portland Metro area. Call ahead or look online to find out more.

**[legacyhealth.org](http://legacyhealth.org) (search "Trauma Nurses")**

**503-413-2340**

Oregon Health & Science University's (OHSU) Doernbecher Children's Hospital sells low-cost, safety certified bike, skate and ski helmets at the Tom Sargent Children's Safety Center.

**[safety@ohsu.edu](mailto:safety@ohsu.edu)**

**503-418-5666**

## Bikes for youth with disabilities

Different Spokes is a full service adaptive-specific bike shop.

**[different-spokes.com](http://different-spokes.com)**

## Family biking sites

A quick online search can provide lots of information and advice about hauling kids by bike or biking as a family. Here are a few good places to start:

**PDX Cargo Bike Gang** A Facebook group of cargo/family biking lovers looking to promote community by group rides and get-togethers.

**[bikeportland.org](http://bikeportland.org)** A local biking news source often covering family biking topics. Use the search tool and type "family biking" to find related articles.

**[familyride.us](http://familyride.us)** A Portland-based blog promoting everyday family biking with two small passengers.

**[totcycle.com](http://totcycle.com)** A Seattle-based site with last updated in 2013 but still with useful information about biking with your kids, and especially having young children on your bike.

**[tinyhelmetsbigbikes.com](http://tinyhelmetsbigbikes.com)** Follow the adventures of a Sacramento-based biking family. Site includes a "Getting Started" section with tips on safety and what to pack for a variety of trips with kids.

# Getting Out

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There are lots of family and kid-focused ways to get out and about on bikes in Portland.

## Portland Sunday Parkways

A series of free events opening the city's largest public space — its streets — for residents to walk, bike and roll. Traffic-free streets connecting parks full of free activities makes for a great family day!

**[portlandsundayparkways.org](http://portlandsundayparkways.org)**

**503-823-7599**

## Kidical Mass PDX

A family-oriented biking group riding rain or shine all over the city, at a slow pace, and only a few miles at a time. Ride themes range from Kites & Bubbles to Family Bike Camping.

**[kidicalmasspdx.org](http://kidicalmasspdx.org)**

## ABI: Bike First! bike clinics

The All Born (In) Bike First! bike clinics work with youngsters and adults with disabilities to systematically teach them how to ride a typical bike. Scholarships available from Portland's Safe Routes to School program.

**[abicommunity.org/bikefirst](http://abicommunity.org/bikefirst)**

For scholarship information, contact Ann at **[annbikefirst@gmail.com](mailto:annbikefirst@gmail.com)**

## Community Cycling Center bike camps

Bike Camp is about the empowerment and independence kids feel from a summer adventure on two wheels. Campers develop safe riding techniques, mechanical skills, and road knowledge through hands-on experience. Camps available for grades 1-12.

**[communitycyclingcenter.org](http://communitycyclingcenter.org)**

**503-287-8864**

## Pedalpalooza family-friendly rides

A whole 3+ weeks of bike-related fun each June. Many of the events are family-friendly and are noted as such on the Shift website.

**[shift2bikes.org](http://shift2bikes.org) (under "Pedalpalooza") or [pedalpalooza.org](http://pedalpalooza.org)**

**For more information** on bicycling, visit:

**[portlandoregon.gov/transportation/at](http://portlandoregon.gov/transportation/at)**

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PORTLAND BUREAU OF TRANSPORTATION

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