

Quick Maintenance Tips

Researched and Written by Women's Only Mountain Biking Inc.

A. Cleaning your bike

1) How often?

This is all dependant on how much you use your bike and the weather conditions you ride in. The more you use it and the wetter and muddier it is, the more often you need to clean it. A clean, well cared for bike works much better.

2) How?

First, you need to remove the dirt from your bike. If you've just finished a wet, muddy ride then let your bike dry in a warm spot while you take a shower and then come back to brush all the dirt off using either a soft cloth or a horsehair brush. Or you can use a hose on a light pressure to spray the dirt off.

Avoid using a hard spray as there are many areas that are sealed and you do not want to be spraying water and dirt into these areas because it can lead to erosion. Areas to avoid when spraying your bike off: shocks, bottom bracket, cranks, and hubs. Wash your bike with hot soapy water and biodegradable soap of course is best. Useful cleaning items include: sponges (small and large), a sock on your hand to get into the tight spots, toothbrushes, SOS pads for tire rims and brushes.

**Be sure to reapply chain oil after cleaning your chain with soap and water.

3) Applying Chain Oil

To do this, move the pedals to reverse the chain while adding oil along the top/inside of the lower loop of the chain. In other words, you want the oil to be on the surface of the chain that is in contact with the chain rings. Continue reversing the pedals and adding oil until you have covered the entire length of the chain. It is best to apply oil outside or in the garage, never in the house. If there is excess oil, use a cry cloth to wipe it off. You want to use Teflon based oil that is made for bikes, not household, sewing machine or car oil.

B. Ensuring Your Bike is in Good Working Order

Just like your car or your body, your bike needs special attention and regular maintenance. At the beginning of the season, be sure to take your bike into a bike shop for a tune up. Then, keep it well maintained by following the guidelines given below. This is a brief overview of areas to be checked regularly and warning signals/indications that your bike may need servicing.

Brakes

- Check brake pads (undo brakes and look for wear line on brake shoes).
- Cables may need to be tightened at a bike shop if brake levers are close to handlebars. This happens after a lot of use and with new brake cables after a few weeks.
- Some bikes have the ability to “dial” the brake cable near the levers to tighten up the cable. This is a temporary measure for stretched cables.

Gears

- Like brakes, after lots of use, cables stretch and require bike shop service.
- Usually gears start to change on their own when they need to be serviced.
- If you are trying to shift into a gear and you have tried making adjustments using your gearing system and it still won't shift smoothly then it needs attention.

Headset

- Stand over the front tire, squeeze your knees into the tire to keep the bike from moving, hold the handlebars and try to move the main stem. If there is any movement, it needs to be adjusted thru service.
- Movement due to the front shocks may be mistaken for movement in the headset, so another way to check is to: apply the front brake with your left hand, place your right hand on the headset and push the bike forward. If you feel any movement in the area of the headset have it checked at a bike shop.

** It is very important to have a tight headset with no movement.

Tires

- You need tread for traction. If you're unsure about the tread on your tires ask an expert such as an avid mountain biker or someone at a bike shop.
- You definitely need new tires if your bike is slipping off rocky, rough surfaces; if you have had several flat tires.
- If you are able to use just your hands to remove your tire from the rim it is stretched and you need a new one.

Rims

- You need to check your rims frequently. New rims are flat on the surface and as they wear they become concave in shape. When you brake you are heating up the brake pads and the rim material. The material will slowly weaken, and splinters and cracks begin. **Splinters or ruts** as well as a concave shaped rim are the first safe signs and warnings to you to change your rims.
- If you notice **cracks** in your rims you need to replace them **immediately** to avoid your brake pads from breaking through the cracks when you apply your brakes and potentially sending you over your handlebars.

Spokes

- Ensure all the spokes are tight and that none are missing. In order to create a 'true' wheel, the rim needs to be equally supported. If any spokes are loose or broken warping of the rim occurs.
- Before the warping gets really bad, take the tire in for a service and hopefully save you the cost of a new rim.

Drive Train

- If there is noise in your drive train (e.g. clicking etc.) that cannot be adjusted through changing your gears, take your bike in for a service as it may be a minor adjustment if you deal with it right away.

Chain

- If you are finding your chain is falling off a lot, it could be stretched. Take it to the bike store to have it measured. If you do not replace your chain soon enough you may need to replace your whole drive train which is much more costly.
- For seasonal riders (i.e. riding 1-2 times a week) you need to change your chain at least once a year. For avid riders (i.e. riding 3+ times a week) your chain needs to be replaced at least twice a year.

Final Point

The above information is a guideline for you on how to keep up on your regular maintenance, so that you are not spending more money than necessary on keeping your bike in good working order.