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Beat the Heat

Cycling in the Heat: How to Ride Smarter in the Summer

THESE SIX TIPS WILL HELP YOU STAY COOL AND RIDE STRONG ALL SUMMER LONG.

By James Herrera / Published: July 5, 2023 / Bicycling.com



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The summer season is upon us, which means: more time to ride bikes! But cycling in the heat—especially when you’re riding through crazy heat waves that are hitting swaths of the U.S. this summer—brings a whole set of challenges, including dehydration that can lead to bonking, decreased performance, and sometimes, unfortunately, some serious heat-related dangers like illness or even death.

That said, a little bit of sunshine or humidity shouldn’t keep you off your bike if you know what you’re doing when cycling in the heat. Here are six tips to help keep you cool when the mercury climbs.

1. Get Acclimated

“The biggest hot-weather mistake cyclists make is riding in the heat without preparation,” says Stacy Sims, Ph.D., an exercise physiologist who is the author of [Roar](#) and [Next Level](#). If you don’t acclimate to hot-weather riding, you won’t reap as many benefits from your workout, and you’ll increase both [perceived effort](#) and potential for injury. Instead, ride early or late in the day when temperatures are the coolest, and use your down time to get used to the heat.

Bikram [hot yoga classes](#) or a few sessions in the sauna are a good place to start. If you must ride during high heat (usually between noon and two o'clock), be sure to take breaks in the shade and [hydrate](#) well.

2. Protect Yourself

A [sunburn](#) does more than fry your skin, Sims says. It contributes to fatigue and increases your metabolism. The latter might sound like a good thing, but it also increases fluid needs, which can be a problem on a hot day when you're already struggling to stay hydrated. Do everything you can to prevent sunburn: Always wear [sunscreen](#); choose jerseys, shorts, and arm skins with built-in sun protection; and wear a cap under your helmet to shield your head. Don't forget the back on your neck which is exposed to the sun in the riding position.

3. Plan Ahead

To prevent your drink from quickly adopting the temperature of [warm tea](#) when cycling in the heat, freeze one bottle at half full and another at the three-quarter mark before topping them off. (Mountain bikers: Put ice cubes into your [hydration pack](#) or fill the pack to half full and freeze.) For longer rides, figure out in advance where you can restock with cold beverages. Consuming cold fluids will help keep your core temperature down and your performance up.

4. Cool Down

While it may be tempting to toss ice cubes down your jersey, Sims advises against it. "Ice against the skin causes blood vessels to constrict, which shoots hot blood back to your core," she says. If your core temperature climbs too high, performance and health can suffer. Instead, pour cool water over your neck and forearms, or wipe them down with a cool, damp towel. Another great option: Try stashing a cooling towel like the [Mission Original Cooling Towel](#) in your jersey pocket. It features a special technology that can cool the towel to about 30 degrees below your average body temperature. Just wet, wring, and snap it to activate the cooling power.

5. Ease Up

Don't try to maintain the same pace or power you'd put out on a milder day when cycling in the heat, says Derick Williamson, cofounder of [Durata Training](#) in Austin, Texas. "Once the sum of the temperature in Fahrenheit plus the relative humidity gets above 130, we dial power ranges back by about 10 to 15 watts," he says. "If you've been doing 15-minute intervals at 220 to 240 watts, that becomes 205 to 225, or we may reduce the efforts to 10 or 12 minutes." If you're racing in steamy conditions, cut your warm-up time in half or more. And if you don't [track your watts](#), just dial back your RPE (rate of perceived exertion) a few notches—instead of riding at a 9, fall back to a level 6 effort.

6. Hydrate Right

In the days leading up to a big ride, increase your consumption of [watery fruits and vegetables](#) (such as watermelon and grapes), Sims says. Sodium helps your body hold on to the fluid you're drinking, so sip an electrolyte beverage during your ride. Aim to drink at a rate of 10 to 12 milliliters per kilogram of body weight, about a 20-ounce bottle every hour for a 150-pound rider. Postride, Sims suggests having a [protein-based recovery drink](#) to rehydrate you faster than a carbohydrate-only one. Protein pulls water with it when it travels to muscles. If you opt for plain water after a ride, pair it with a snack or meal that contains protein, carbohydrates, and sodium to replenish.

Okay riders, be smart, stay cool, ride your bike. Until next time,

Make Every Ride Epic,

Darryl