

Maintaining your bike

A black bicycle with a brown seat and a rear rack is leaning against a stone wall. The wall is made of large, irregular stones and is partially covered by a red brick ledge. The bicycle has a black frame, handlebars, and tires. The background shows a stone wall and a brick ledge.

A WELL MAINTAINED BIKE WILL GIVE YOU GREATER PERFORMANCE, RELIABILITY AND SAFETY AND YOU CAN CARRY OUT MANY REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE JOBS YOURSELF. ADDITIONALLY, YOU SHOULD HAVE YOUR BIKE PROFESSIONALLY SERVICED AROUND ONCE A YEAR. THE TYPE OF MAINTENANCE DEPENDS ON USE, FREQUENCY AND DISTANCE OF YOUR RIDING.

Basic bike maintenance

A quick check

Whilst it's a good idea to complete this check every time you ride, pay particular attention if you haven't ridden the bike recently, or have removed and replaced any components:

- check tyre pressure. Tyres should feel firm if squeezed hard. Firm tyres make riding easier and reduce the risk of punctures
- check that the seat height is correct for you and the seat post is firmly inserted
- check that both wheels are securely fastened and that quick release levers (if you have them) are tight and in the closed position, parallel to the front forks (front) or seat stay (rear)
- check the brake action by applying front and rear brakes, test riding carefully if unsure.

Basic bike toolkit

Most basic maintenance can be undertaken at home, using a few simple tools:

- puncture repair kit
- tyre levers
- allen keys or multi tool
- spanners and a screwdriver
- cleaning rags and brush
- bike specific lubricant
- floor pump (if you become a regular rider, a floor pump left at home will enable you to easily pump your tyres up to their recommended pressure).

Routine maintenance

Around once a month, depending on use, perform these maintenance tasks.

Check wheels and tyres

Check tyre pressure. The setting is written on the tyre's sidewall. Check for wear or cracks in the tyre rubber. Lift the bike and spin the wheels, observing any distortion in the rotation. If you have a buckled wheel, take it to a bike store.

Drop test and frame check

Hold the bike around 30cm off the ground. Then, while loosely supporting the frame, allow the bike to 'drop' to the ground. Listen and feel for any looseness in components. If detected, tighten using the appropriate spanner or allen key/multi tool. Pay particular attention to the handlebars and stem. Make a close visual inspection of the weld points on the frame for cracks.

Brake adjustment

When braking hard, there should still be clearance between the brake lever and the handlebar. Use the cable adjustment screw on the brake lever to tighten if necessary. Make a visual inspection of brake pads or disc pads. If brake pads are worn below grooves replace them. Disc pads can be difficult to replace if worn below the recommended thickness. Consult a bike shop for replacements.

Cleaning and lubrication

Use a cloth, brush or chain cleaning tool and a solvent/degreaser to clean the chain. Apply a bike specific lubricant (don't use mineral oils such as car oil, as they attract dirt). Trickle lubricant onto each chain link, all cables, pivot points and wipe external surfaces with a cloth or paper towel. Cleaning and lubrication should be done more often when riding in wet or dirty conditions.

Lights

Check operation and replace bike light batteries as soon as they become dim (see the **Accessories** section).

Professional bike servicing

Bike stores offer professional servicing, generally undertaken by qualified mechanics. This will help keep the more complex and inaccessible workings of your bike, like gears and bearings, in great condition. If you purchase a bike from a bike store you will generally be provided with a complimentary service after several months.

More information on bike maintenance is available from bookshops, libraries and the internet. In addition there are various organisations in South Australia that offer basic and advanced bike maintenance training. Ask at your local bike shop for details.



Fixing a flat tyre

Chances are you will get a puncture at some time. Knowing how to confidently repair a puncture makes it an inconvenience rather than a disaster.

The best approach is to carry a spare tube as well as a puncture repair kit. Replace the tube on the roadside and take the punctured tube home to discard or fix at your leisure.

Here's a quick guide to changing a tube and fixing a puncture. It's a good idea to practise this at home a few times before you find yourself needing to do it on the roadside.



Remove the wheel

Turn the bike over, release or loosen the brake callipers, undo the wheel fastening (loosen the quick release or undo bolts on wheel). For the rear wheel, move the chain to the smallest gear of the chain wheel and cluster. Remove the wheel.

Remove the tyre

Release one side of the tyre from the rim using tyre levers as shown and pull the tube out, starting at the valve.

Find the cause

Check outside the tyre for obvious culprits such as thorns or nails. Carefully feel inside the tyre for sharp points. If you find the cause, remove it and proceed with installing your new tube.

Installing a new or repaired tube

Start inserting the tube between the wheel rim and tyre, at the point where the valve goes through the rim hole. Then work your way around to insert the whole tube into the rim, making sure no tube protrudes. Take care to ensure the valve is seated correctly through the hole in the rim. Use hands and tyre levers to push the tyre back inside the wheel rim. Inflate to correct pressure. Reinstall the wheel and don't forget to re-tighten your brakes if you loosened them.

Patching the tube

If you have found the puncture site, begin with the repair. If not, reinflate the tube and check the valve. If that seems fine, hold the tube under water in a bucket, looking for bubbles to indicate the puncture site, and mark when found. Sandpaper the area immediately surrounding the hole. Spread glue over the scratched area slightly larger than the patch size and leave 5 minutes for the glue to become tacky. Remove the foil cover from the patch and apply to the glued area firmly. If possible, allow to set under pressure (use a clamp or heavy object) overnight.

