

# THE NO-GYM, *ALL-FUN* WORKOUT PLAN

It's as easy as riding a—well, you know. Biking is the escape that can burn about 500 calories an *hour*. Our guide is packed with motivation, gear, and wisdom so you can get in the best shape of your life.

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**I**F ANYONE HAD TOLD ME as a child or a teen or even a 25-year-old that I'd eventually become smitten with cycling, I'd have laughed in disbelief. My balance is terrible, for starters, which is probably why it took me a full two years to learn to ride my purple banana-seated beauty, suffering humiliating spills along the way. Then I broke my nose at 12 in a face plant, after I misjudged the distance between my wheel and a friend's. Spatial relations are also not my forte.

When I was nearly 30, single but wanting a special vacation, I signed up for a cycling tour through hilly Vermont. The only riding I'd done was on the recumbent bike in the gym, with a book in my hand, resistance set on low. Much to my surprise, I fell in love—a little bit with the tour leader and his rock-solid quads, but even more with the feel of the wind in my face and my heart in my mouth as I coasted down hills, the autumn foliage a blur of gold and crimson. What shocked me is that I also got into going uphill, or rather, I began to crave



the satisfaction that came from conquering an incline without stopping to walk, clicking my gears into the right configuration to get me there. Plus, I dropped five pounds and developed nice quads of my own. I did take a tumble, but for the first time, I saw my “road rash” as a badge of honor. I felt strong, capable, like a badass, my body surprising me with its determination. The secret athlete within me had emerged.

**A**T HOME IN NEW YORK CITY, I started hitching rides out of town with friends, discovering the joy of pedaling past traffic jams to get to a hideaway beach, no parking passes required. I still fell, usually when starting up or dismounting. But the pleasure made up for the occasional black-and-blues.

Unlike the other exercise I’d done so aimlessly, cycling didn’t feel like work; it felt like traveling. There was no telling what might happen, like the day I went riding around a New England island with a man I’d been dating for a few years—a keeper, I hoped. After a lunch of oysters and sauvignon blanc at a clam shack we happened upon, I pedaled off, wobbly from the wine, and promptly tipped over. My guy helped me up, brushed me off, and together, we made our way back to our inn, where he asked me to marry him. I said yes. Now, five years later, I still ride with him, and on my own, hopping on a bike wherever I happen to be, hoping to get a better, less frenetic view, but always confident that my two wheels will lead me to a new adventure, tumbles be damned. **11**

**PRO TIP**

**SHIFT YOUR WEIGHT WHEN YOU BRAKE** | Since your momentum takes you forward, moving just half a centimeter to the back of the seat can keep you from losing your balance, says Stephanie Kaplan, product manager for Specialized bikes.

## READY TO RIDE? START HERE

If your eyes glaze over at the thought of chains and gears, don’t worry: Riding a bike really is the easiest thing. This quick explainer from Kaplan will set you up for success.

**TIRES**

If your tires are pumped up too much, you’ll feel every bump in the road. Too little, and you risk getting a flat. So use a bike pump with a gauge to check your tire pressure before each ride. (More on how to do that later.) The ideal level—for example, between 90 and 120 PSI—is imprinted on the tire’s sidewall.

**SADDLE**

When your seat is at the right height, you should be able to touch the lowest pedal with only a slight bend in your knee. Ask someone to hold your bike for you while you check, and adjust it accordingly.

**HANDLEBARS**

It’s normal to lean forward to hold the handlebars, but you shouldn’t be seated so far back that you have to lock your arms to reach them. Bend your elbows and keep your back straight to maintain the most control.

**GEAR SHIFTERS**

Changing the gears makes it easier or harder to pedal. Most bikes have a left shifter that helps you set your bike to the range you want to ride in—from easy to hard—and a right shifter you can use for fine-tuning within that range.

**CHAINRING**

Your bike chain runs from the crank at the center of the bike back to the derailleur and cassette on the rear wheel. Make sure it’s greased with chain lube (ask for it at a bike shop) so it rides smoothly and doesn’t rust. Wipe off any dirt and grime with a rag before you apply it.



**BRAKES**

Remember this: Right brake for your rear wheel, left for the front. Gently squeeze *both* when you want to slow down. If you clamp too hard, you risk skidding, which can feel scary. ➤

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## FIND A BIKE

Whether you want to ride to work or go off-road, there's a style (and price) that suits. Get measured first so it *fits*, too.

### COMMUTER

Perfect for the cubicle-dweller: Commuter bikes have a low frame so you can climb aboard even in a pencil skirt. (A chain cover will save your clothes from grease stains too.) Toss your bag onto a rack or in a basket.



**STEAL** Schwinn Gateway (\$200; target.com)  
**SPLURGE** Electra Loft 7i (\$710; electrabike.com)

### FITNESS HYBRID

Want to hit up the farmers' market one day and head out on a sweaty ride the next? This all-purpose hybrid is yours. Its thicker tires get through all kinds of terrain, while the comfy, lightweight frame and many gears help you go fast and up hills.



**STEAL** Cannondale Quick (from \$399; cannondale.com)  
**SPLURGE** Trek 7.5 FX Women's (\$1,100; trekbikes.com)

### SPEED

If you ride only on roads and you're ready to start blowing past other cyclists, cast your eyes here. The curved handlebars make you more aerodynamic, and every inch of the bike is lighter, so you can cover more ground in less time. Just note: These bikes are never cheap.



**STEAL** Specialized Dolce (\$770; specialized.com)  
**SPLURGE** Liv Avail 1 Disc (\$1,500; giant-bicycles.com)

### MOUNTAIN

These bikes have shock-absorbing tires and grippy treads that help you stay "rubber-side down," if your main goal is to take to the trails.



**STEAL** Cannondale Foray 4 (\$415; cannondale.com)  
**SPLURGE** Specialized Jynx Expert 650B (\$1,100; specialized.com)



A helmet is essential, but what's up with that spandex? Cyclists explain what to wear...

#### ON YOUR HEAD

You should only be able to fit two fingers between your eyebrows and the brim of your helmet, and the strap and your chin. "It should be so snug that it may leave an imprint on your forehead," Kaplan says. Worried about helmet hair? Start with hairspray to fight static and shield your style, then, if necessary, add a texturizer when you take off the helmet and shake out your hair, says Dana Tizzio, a stylist at Butterfly Studio Salon in New York City.

#### ON YOUR FEET

Reach for sneakers with stiffer soles (like cross-trainers) rather than running shoes, which are so flexible that your foot may arch over the pedal, weakening your stroke.

#### EVERYWHERE ELSE

There's a reason cyclists wear spandex: It wicks away sweat, which can cause chafing, says Rachel Buschart, a group fitness instructor at Equinox. "Tight-fitting clothes also won't flutter in the wind, which can slow you down." Look for bottoms with a built-in, seamless pad (called a chamois), which helps prevent your rump from getting sore. On top, Lyles recommends longer shirts to shield your lower back from sunburn.

#### PRO TIPS



#### ALWAYS WEAR SUNGLASSES

"They'll keep your eyes clear from any debris and also from tearing because of the wind," says pro cyclist Laura Van Gilder, a World Championship rider. Your shades should feel snug so they don't slide down your nose or fog up.



#### START WITH A 5- TO 10-MILE LOOP

"You never want to be too far from home if you start to struggle," says pro cyclist and ambassador for Specialized bikes Liz Lyles. She suggests using an app like Strava or MapMyRide to plan new routes. Stick to flat surfaces and rolling hills, or paths with big hills at the start of your ride, *not* at the end when you're more fatigued.

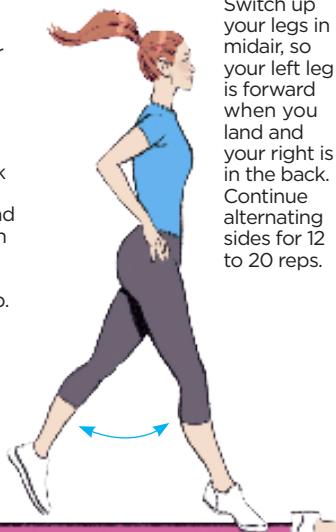
# CONQUER ANY HILL

It's one of the most intimidating parts of cycling, we know. But with these strategies, you can stop staring at that incline and just get over it already.

## 1. LAY THE FOUNDATION

You need to build strength to climb hills, so do **jump lunges**, says SoulCycle master instructor Rique Uresti.

Step back with your left leg and bend both knees 90 degrees, then jump.



Switch up your legs in midair, so your left leg is forward when you land and your right is in the back. Continue alternating sides for 12 to 20 reps.

**Does that seem too tough?** Start with alternating lunges, and slowly build up to getting some air, even if it's every other rep.

## 2. SHIFT YOUR WAY UP

Before you hit the incline, shift your right (rear) shifter to a lower gear to make it easier to pedal. Shift down on the left, too. The ease of the pedals might feel silly at first, but you'll be glad when you can climb the hill without needing to stop. **"As you go up, your effort level should feel more challenging than you're used to, but not so difficult to maintain that you feel like you're going to fall off the bike,"** Lyles says. Once you've reached the top, move your shifters back to a middle, moderate setting.

## 3. PERFECT YOUR FORM

Standing while you pedal increases the amount of power you're able to generate, so you can get up a hill faster. It also gives your usual biking muscles a much-needed break. Before standing, make sure you shift into a slightly more challenging gear. **"You need a lot of resistance on the pedal so the added force of your weight doesn't cause you to 'spin out' and perhaps lose control of the bike,"** Lyles says. Standing's tough, though, so alternate between that and sitting, and practice it on a flat road before you add it to your incline.

### PRO TIP

**YOU SHOULDN'T BE SORE, AHM, DOWN THERE** | Your local bike shop may have a tool that can help you find the most comfortable seat for you. "It's worth the \$20 or more it can cost to be measured," says Jen Audia, marketing manager for Liv bikes.



### PUMP A TIRE

- Remove the cap from the valve on your wheel, and if there's a little knob underneath, unscrew it as far as you can (it won't come off).
- Attach the pump head—most have two sides because there are two types of valves, but you'll use the side that fits more snugly. Flip the lever to lock it in place.
- Pump until the gauge reaches the air pressure range imprinted on the tire. The closer you get, the harder it'll feel to pump.
- Release the pump, screw down the knob if you have one, and put the cap back on the valve.



No need to pay a bike shop guy every time you need a tune-up. This stuff you can totally do, says Audia, who leads nationwide clinics on cycle maintenance.



### PUT THE CHAIN BACK ON

- If your chain slips off the chainring (usually just as you're shifting gears), coast to a stop. Leave the bike in the gear it was in when the chain came off.
- Kneel next to the bike and grab the bottom of the chain with your thumb and forefinger. Pull it down, then forward toward the front of the bike, and slide it onto the ring you're shifted into. Not 100-percent sure which one that was? Slip it on one of the smallest rings. If you need more slack, move your left shifter to the smallest cog and try again.
- "This is a quick fix to get you back on the road. But if your chain continues to fall off, visit a shop to see if your bike needs an adjustment," Audia says.