

# How to Climb Steep Hills While Cycling

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Co-authored by 16 contributors

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Climbing hills on a bicycle isn't everyone's idea of fun... Yet, if you live in a hilly area or you're traveling through hills, why deny yourself the pleasure of continuing to ride regularly just because of those steeper hills? Climbing steep hills on a cycle requires knowing a few tips about increasing your stamina, positioning yourself correctly on the cycle, and changing those gears. So hop back on your bike with this advice and find yourself a few steep hills to practice on until it feels much easier!

## Steps



**1 Prepare yourself mentally.** If you've cycled a hill before, you'll already know that it hurts physically and takes a lot of effort. If you've long been the sort to hop off the bike and walk it up the hill, you'll need a little mental prepping first!

- Accept that riding uphill is more effort. Once you stop fighting it mentally, you can spend more time motivating your body and learning how to make the ride easier on you.
- Get excited about the challenge of making it to the top of the hill. This is something that you're quite capable of doing and proving it to yourself can be a lot of fun in between the agony!
- Don't expect to go fast. That's unrealistic and likely to wear you out before you've hardly begun.
- Understand the benefits to your body of cycling on hilly terrain. Hilly terrain builds your **fitness levels** up by helping your body learn to use oxygen more efficiently. Also, the process of climbing the hill on a bike uses different muscle groups as you shift about on the bike to maintain maximum power. The climb allows you to work hard, and the descent allows you to recover, providing a perfect exercise workout per each hill.<sup>[1]</sup>



**2 Start the hill climb staying seated on the bike seat (or saddle).** Keep your weight back and hold the handlebars over the top and close to the center.<sup>[2]</sup> Your hands should be about 2-3 inches (5-7.5cm) from the center stem to allow maximum **breathing**. If your chest is open and shoulders back, you'll be able to breath much more easily.

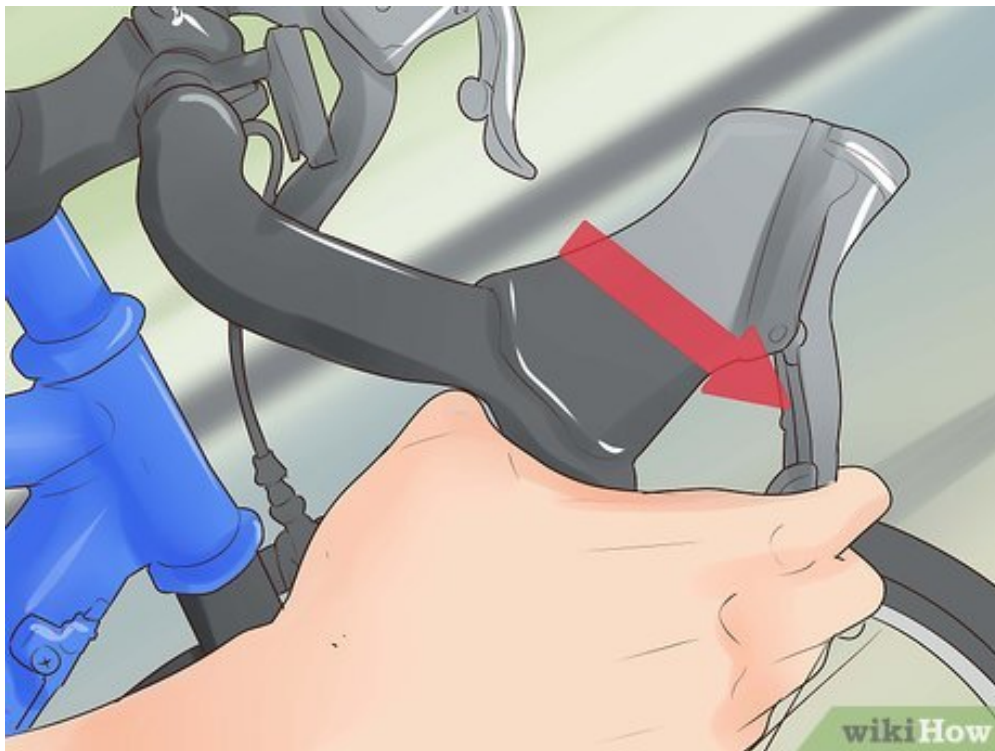


**3 As you move up the hill, **crouch** down.** This requires you to keep your body low and your elbows low but slightly pointed out to keep your chest open for easier breathing and to keep your upper body relaxed.<sup>[3]</sup>



**4** **Toward the top of the hill, stand up from the seat (saddle).** At this point, use all of your body weight to assist you in pushing down hard on the **pedals**. Standing up takes a lot more energy than sitting down, so don't overuse this technique; keep it till the last portion of the steep hill. Your hands should now sit on top of the brake levers.

- Shift your body in time with your legs. Keep your **back straight** and your chest open to aid good breathing.<sup>[4]</sup>



**5 Learn how to **shift gear** going uphill.** Those gears are there to be used, and uphill they will definitely assist you with extra power if you change them effectively. However, it takes practice to get used to how it feels to change gears as a method of changing the pace and power when climbing a hill, so don't despair, just keep practicing it.

- Shift the gears *in anticipation* of or just before each terrain gradient change, not once you've already reached each gradient. Keep pedaling while you change gears, so as to maintain momentum.<sup>[5]</sup> The aim is to keep your effort as constant as possible.
- A low gear is needed for going uphill (you'll need the higher gear for going back down).



**6 Keep practicing.** This technique won't be easy for the first few tries but it's important to **persevere**. It is only in the doing that you will learn the feel for climbing the hill on the bike and learn the right timing for shifting your body weight on the bike to achieve the maximum power for the least effort.

- Start with shorter hills and gradually increase your trials to steeper ones.





**7 Try using low gear with a steep hill.** Once you're feeling more confident with hill climbing on a bicycle, learn the technique for climbing a hill economically. This technique requires that you stay seated and use a low gear, and don't rely on standing up for much of the time:[6]

- Breathe regularly and deeply.
- Keep it slow and gradual in the early stages of the hill climb. This isn't a race, it's about economizing your energy usage.
- Select the **low gear** that will still allow for reasonably fast pedaling.
- Sit up and hold the outer edges of the handlebars. This will ensure that your breathing is made easier by an open chest.
- Once the hill gets much harder, and you notice you've no lower gears left to use, grip onto the **brake hoods**. Pull them to give you more power when pedaling.
- Only now use standing briefly if needed. At this point, you should intuitively know what feels best for you in the combination between standing and sitting in the bike, for the most economic use of your energy.
- Stay focused on a steady, rhythmical climb that makes the most of every turn of the wheels to pull you up this hill. This kind of slower but powerful riding takes time to master but it's efficient and is good for longer rides, such as when traveling through hilly country for long distances. You are far less likely to tire out than using the method that requires standing to get you up the hills.



**8** In turns, take the long way on the outer side of the turn. It may seem illogical, but you'll lose less momentum that way.



**9** Have a rest at the top of the hill. For a particularly strenuous hill climb, a brief hilltop rest may be in order, especially while training yourself to get used to it.



**10 Descend with care.** Be alert for obstacles like cars, pedestrians, animals, and objects on the road. Don't go down too quickly – use both your brakes to pull back the speed, and by sitting upright in your seat, so that your body acts like an "air brake".<sup>[7]</sup>

- If you're descending over uneven terrain such as on a **mountain bike** trail, it's best to get out of the seat and let the bike take all the bumps for you. The steeper the descent, the further back you should place your weight while looking forwards.<sup>[8]</sup>



## Community Q&A

### Question

**I have to bike a hill with a class of about 18 people. How do I use these tips when there are people surrounding me?**



**Tushar Sharma**  
Community Answer

While climbing on your bike, keep your hydraulic lock locked to prevent skids. Keep your seat high as it helps in peddling in low gears (depending upon the incline and your comfort). Try to never stop peddling as you might not be able to get on your cycle again.

Helpful 11 Not Helpful 2

### Question

**I have an 18-gear cycle; how do I use front gear and back gear for hilly roads, and for normal roads, which gear should I use?**



Community Answer

Usually when climbing, it's best to be in the small front ring and the largest back ring. If your cadence is about 100 rpm, then whatever gear you're in is fine. It depends on the road, but as long as your pedaling is at a level you're comfortable with, you're fine.

Helpful 6 Not Helpful 0

#### Question

**Do you have tips for starting again halfway up a hill after you've stopped?**



Community Answer

Dig your dominant foot into the pedal with all your weight, and then push hard with the other foot to get yourself going.

Helpful 2 Not Helpful 0

#### Question

**For friction and speed, what is ideal?**



**Ethan Ong**  
Community Answer

When you go very fast from the bottom up a steep hill it will take more time for friction to stop you and if you keep biking, your momentum will keep on going.

Helpful 0 Not Helpful 0

#### Question

**This article is somewhat unclear about what kind of bike is being used, can I assume the same of a lean over road bike?**



**Ethan Ong**  
Community Answer

You can tell what kind of bike is being used by seeing what how big the wheels and the frame. If the wheel is smaller and thicker and heavier it's a mountain bike. A road bike is has bigger wheels but is skinnier and lighter.

Helpful 0 Not Helpful 0

#### Question

**I have 7 numbers on my gear change on the right handle bar. What number should these be on to get the best ride and with what number on the left gear change?**



**AmazingHockeyGirl**  
Community Answer

There is no specific number. Try around with the different gears until you find one you like.

Helpful 0 Not Helpful 0



#### Tips

- Always look ahead so that you know where you're headed. The temptation can be to look down in concentration but you risk crashing into something or missing something if you do this too much.
- Ride on the outside of the curb to save energy and not lose momentum. And be prepared mentally to suffer, that way you know you are getting a good workout.
- Lean forward when going uphill.
- When you're really good at dealing with hills, you can start to learn hill sprints if you're into racing on your bike, or you just want a really strenuous workout.
- Steep hill climbing requires lots of practice. Expect to fail but keep attacking it. Eventually you'll master the skill and improve endurance.



- Off-road hills require a different climbing technique. Standing on trails and other terrain that has loose surface can risk a fall off the bike, so you have to be very careful to only use this when really needed and to weight yourself well. Use the gears as explained above but keep your weight as much as possible over the back of the rear wheel to maintain the bike's traction on the loose surface. If you do have to stand on an especially steep part, keep your weight back and your body low and barely leave the seat (think "hovering" over it). Pull back, not up, on the handlebars.[9]



## Warnings

- Don't climb something too steep; know your limits and push yourself only as far as is safe. The hill will still be there tomorrow for another try.

## References

1. ↑ Chris Sidwells, *7 Week Cycling for Fitness*, p. 76, (2006), ISBN 1-4053-1101-0
2. ↑ Chris Sidwells, *7 Week Cycling for Fitness*, p. 76, (2006), ISBN 1-4053-1101-0
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5. ↑ Chris Sidwells, *7 Week Cycling for Fitness*, p. 67, (2006), ISBN 1-4053-1101-0
6. ↑ Chris Sidwells, *7 Week Cycling for Fitness*, p. 83, (2006), ISBN 1-4053-1101-0
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8. ↑ Chris Sidwells, *7 Week Cycling for Fitness*, p. 106, (2006), ISBN 1-4053-1101-0
9. ↑ Chris Sidwells, *7 Week Cycling for Fitness*, p. 115, (2006), ISBN 1-4053-1101-0

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