

# How to Start Biking

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Getting into the habit of biking daily can be quite easy so long as you get the right equipment and don't get too ambitious at the beginning. To start, choose between a road or mountain bike based on the type of terrain that you'll be biking on. Then, get a solid helmet and download a cycling app that will make it easy to track your distance and speed. Start off with a small goal of biking 1–5 mi (1.6–8.0 km) per ride. Bike 2-4 times a week based on your level of comfort until you're able to bike for longer distances more regularly.

## Things You'll Need

### ■ Getting the Appropriate Gear

- ☐ Helmet
- ☐ Cycling shorts (optional)
- ☐ Cycling jersey (optional)
- ☐ Athletic shoes
- ☐ Air pump
- ☐ App for tracking distance

## Method 1 of 4: Buying a Bike



**1** Get a **mountain bike** if you want to ride on unpaved surfaces. Mountain bikes aren't exclusively for mountains! If you plan on regularly riding on dirt, unpaved gravel, or grass, select a mountain bike to make your experience more comfortable. Mountain bikes are heavier and have strong frames, which helps keep them from breaking or losing traction on rocky terrain or bumpy surfaces.<sup>[1]</sup>

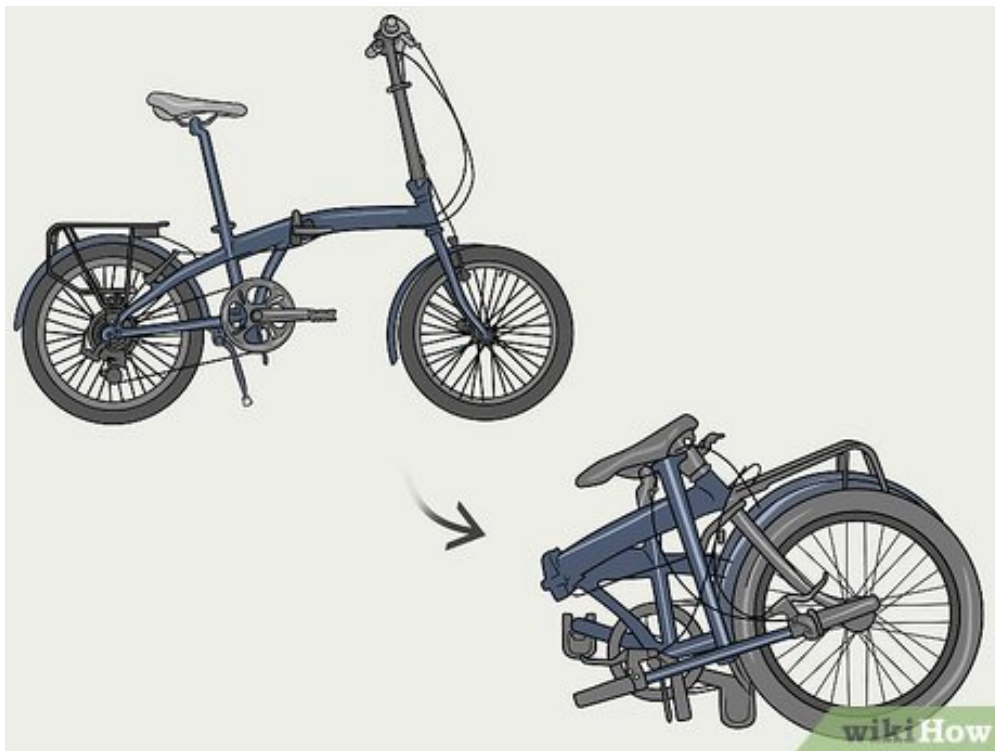
- If you're going to be biking over long distances, look for a bike with a clip for your water bottle.
- Mountain bikes can be kind of heavy and bulky. If you plan on keeping it in your home, keep the storage space in mind when looking at a bike.
- A used mountain bike will usually cost \$100-300. New mountain bikes tend to be at least \$400, but you'll regularly see prices in the \$1000-2000 range.

**Tip:** You can certainly take a mountain bike on a paved road, but their heavy weight and wide wheels will make it harder to move faster as you pedal.



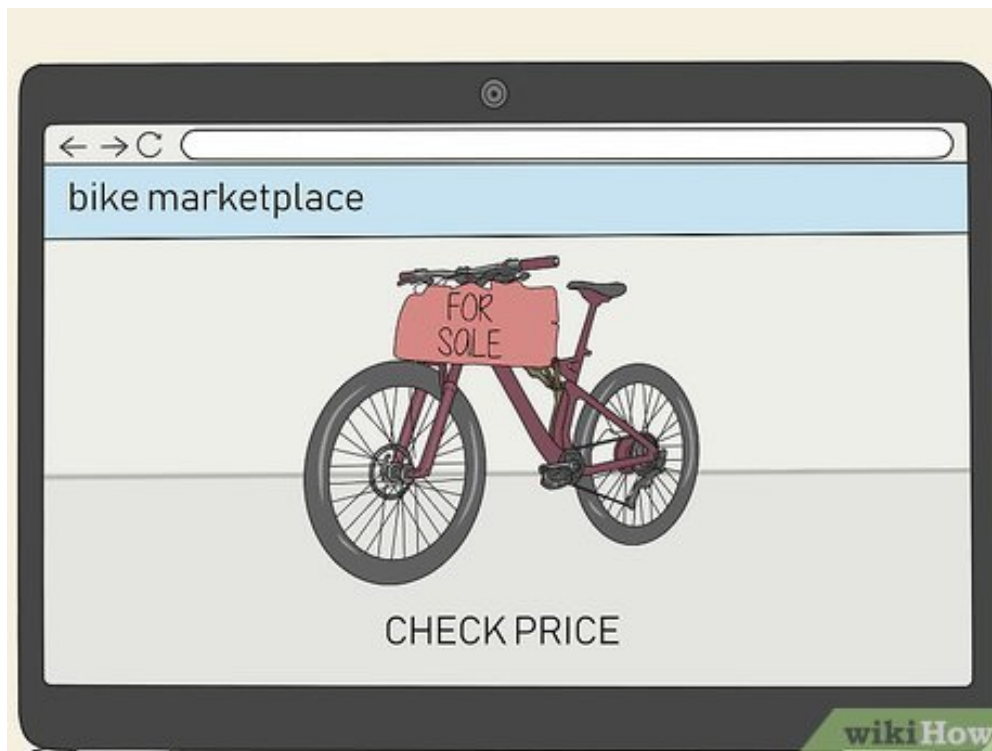
**2 Select a lightweight road bicycle if you'll be riding on paved roads.** If you're going to be doing most of your biking on streets or paved trails, select a road bike. Road bikes are smaller than mountain bikes and have thinner wheels, which makes it easier to get them up to a higher speed. Road bikes are also lighter, which makes them easier to steer, carry, and maneuver.<sup>[2]</sup>

- If you live in an apartment and will ever have to bring your bike inside, a road bike will be easier to store than a mountain bike.
- Used mountain and road bikes tend to be equally expensive. Expect to spend \$100-300 on a used road bike. A new road bike will cost \$400-\$1000.
- Racing bicycles are a type of road bike. They tend to be extremely light and they're designed to go as fast as possible on paved surfaces. They tend to be quite expensive and fragile though, so don't pick a racing bike to start unless you're always going to be biking on smooth pavement with no obstacles.



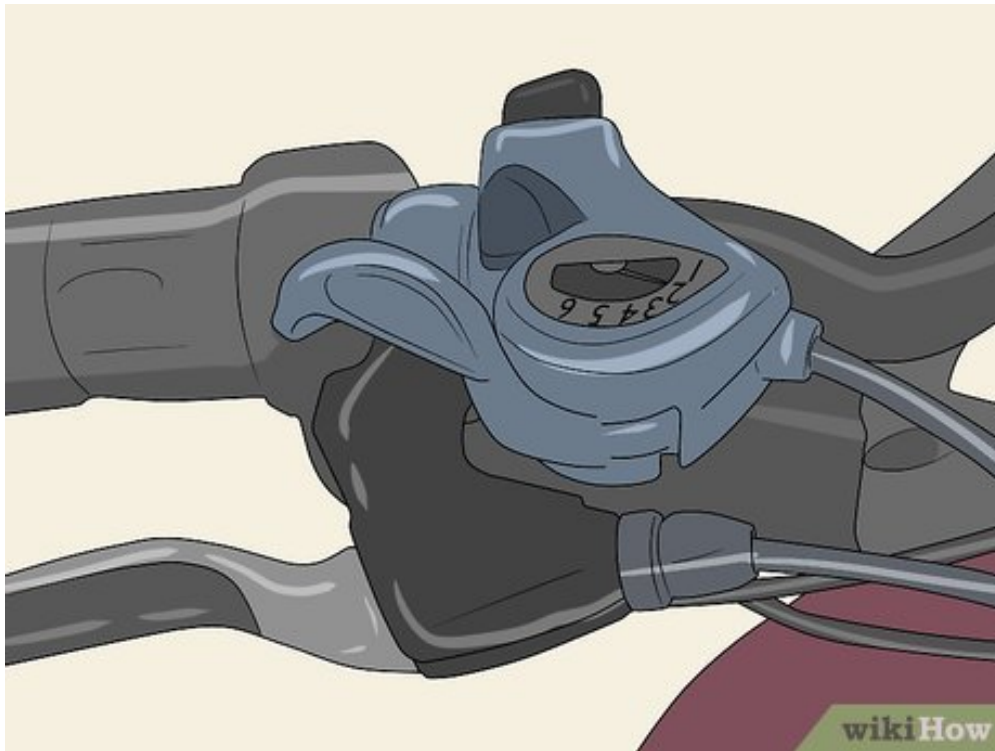
**3** Get a **folding bicycle** if you're tight on space or live in an apartment. If you live in a second or third-floor apartment or you have no storage space whatsoever, buy a folding bicycle. Folding bikes can be easily disassembled to make them smaller, and they are extremely lightweight. However, they can't go very fast and they're awful at making it up hills. This makes folding bikes an excellent option if your only purpose is to make short trips in a congested area.<sup>[3]</sup>

- Folding bikes are usually a little cheaper than a mountain or road bike. New folding bikes are usually \$100-300, but they're even cheaper if you can find a used one.



**4 Buy a used bike if you're just starting out.** The cost differential between new and used bikes can be quite extreme. You can get a solid used bike for \$150, but a decent model that is brand new may cost you \$500-1,000. Since you're just starting out, you may not know what your preferences are. If you get a new bike and it turns out that it isn't right for you, you'll be out quite a bit of money. On the other hand, selling a used bike and getting a different model isn't that big of a deal.<sup>[4]</sup>

- Used bikes aren't necessarily worse than new bikes. They just tend to not be as shiny and may not have a ton of features. A used bike can ride just as well as a new bike, though.



**5 Avoid a custom or fixed-gear bike until you're used to biking regularly.** To save yourself some money and heartbreak, wait until you know precisely what you're looking for before buying a custom or fixed-gear bike. Fixed-gear bikes don't have brakes, and they can be quite difficult to get used to if you've never controlled one. Custom bikes will come with features and components that you won't even notice unless you're a veteran rider.<sup>[5]</sup>

- Custom bikes use specific, buyer-requested components to achieve a certain weight balance, feel, and frame structure. This is unnecessary for someone that's just starting out.



**6 Go to a reputable bike shop and get a bike that feels right.** Don't buy your bike online. Instead, go to a local bike shop and ask to test ride some models that look interesting to you. When taking a test ride, make sure that the bike is comfortable and feels good in your hands. Your bike should be easy to maneuver and pedal. Once you've found a bike that you like, pay for it and enjoy your new ride.<sup>[6]</sup>

- While some high-end bike shops don't sell used models, almost every other bike shop sells used bikes.
- Don't worry if the bike squeaks when you ride it. The shop will adjust the brakes and oil the chain for you before you walk off with it.
- Buy a bike with gears. This will make it easier to control how fast you pedal. Almost all road and mountain bikes have gears. The gears look like little knobs or switches on the handlebar that you can turn to change the track that the chain is on.



## Method 2 of 4: Getting the Appropriate Gear



**1 Buy a new helmet that fits your head comfortably.** A helmet is mandatory if you want to ride a bike. Get a helmet with a hard shell that fits your head. The helmet should be tight enough that it doesn't fall off while you're riding, but loose enough that it doesn't hurt when you wear it for an extended period of time.<sup>[7]</sup>

- The difference in pricing between helmets is usually based on how aerodynamic or stylish it is. Unless you plan on racing in the future, go ahead and grab a cheaper model. Feel free to spend a little for a fashionable helmet, though!

**Warning:** Avoid the cushion helmets that are often marketed towards younger riders. These helmets don't offer nearly as much protection as a hard-shell helmet.





**2** **Select a comfortable pair of bike shorts if you're taking long rides.** All of the fancy bike clothing isn't mandatory for an amateur cyclist, although it does serve a purpose. If you are certain that biking is going to become a regular activity for you, pick up a comfortable pair of bike shorts. Bike shorts are tighter, and usually made of spandex or nylon. They're designed to keep your thighs from chaffing and your pants from catching in the chain as you ride.<sup>[8]</sup>

- You can ride a bike while wearing regular pants if you'd like. Sweatpants, jeans, and athletic shorts are all perfectly fine to bike in. If you do find your pants getting caught in the chain regularly, roll your left pant leg up to keep it raised about the gears.



**3 Purchase a cycling jersey if you want to stay dry while you ride.** Bike jerseys are tight-fitting nylon or spandex shirts. They tend to be brightly colored so that you're highly visible when riding at night. They're also highly absorbent and will soak up sweat as you ride to keep you dry. Get a comfortable bike jersey that fits well to stay dry and visible.<sup>[9]</sup>

- Again, specialized cycling clothing isn't required if you're a beginner. You can easily ride in a T-shirt, tank top, sweater, or jacket.
- If you're going to wear a regular shirt and bike at night, throw on a reflective vest so that drivers and pedestrians can easily see you.



**4 Wear athletic shoes before moving up to cycling shoes.** Cycling shoes have ridges that hook into the grooves of some bike pedals. Since you're probably starting out with standard pedals, they aren't necessary. Wear a good pair of tennis or running shoes when starting out. Tie your laces tight and double-knot your shoes to keep the laces from getting caught in the chain. If they do get caught regularly, you can tuck your laces into your shoes before you get on your bike.<sup>[10]</sup>

- The other purpose of cycling shoes is to make your energy transfer more efficient as you ride. Your goal when starting out should be to maintain a good posture and get in the habit of biking, though. If you only care about speed, you're going to get frustrated when you start biking.



**5 Get an air pump to avoid making frequent trips to the gas station.** The air in bike tires naturally escapes over time, even if you don't have a punctured tire and keep your air valve capped tight. To avoid having to ride to the gas station every couple of weeks, get an air pump to refill your bike's tires.<sup>[11]</sup>

- Get a manual pump if you want to save money. Buy an electric or mechanical air pump if you want to make filling your tires easier.



**6 Download a cycling app to track your distance and speed.** Instead of spending money on a fancy pedometer or GPS system, download an app to track how far and fast you bike. Bike Computer, Strava, and MapMyRide are the most popular apps for bikers. They'll track your speed, route, and monitor how often you ride. This information is important when it comes to tracking your progress.<sup>[12]</sup>

- Strava, Bike Computer, and MapMyRide are all free. You can download them from your phone's app store.
- You can connect a Bluetooth heart rate monitor to Strava and Bike Computer if you'd like.

## Method 3 of 4: Riding Your Bike



- 1 Adjust the saddle so that your knee is slightly bent as you pedal.** When your pedals are the closest to the ground, your knee should be slightly bent to avoid putting stress on your tendons and hamstrings. Adjust your saddle by lifting the latch and pulling it out to the unlocked position. Then, slide your seat up or down to adjust its height. Close the latch and press it tight to lock your seat in place.<sup>[13]</sup>



**2 Develop a posture that's comfortable for you to maintain.** There is no proper stance for typical cycling, but the straighter you can keep your spine, the better. When riding your bike, keep the crest of the seat aligned with the center of your tailbone. Stay seated while pedaling and try to sit up straight while staying comfortable. The more relaxed you are while you ride, the more likely you are to bike for an extended period of time.<sup>[14]</sup>

**Tip:** There is an ideal stance for racing cycling which makes you more aerodynamic, but you shouldn't start out hunched over and leaning forward like a professional racer. This will make it difficult to stay comfortable as you start riding.





- 3 Ride with your hands in the drops of the handles to steer and brake.** The drops of the handles refer to the loop where the handles dip down. Place both hands on the bottom of the handle to make steering and braking easier. On a mountain bike, there are no drops, so place your hands where it's comfortable and easy to reach the brakes.<sup>[15]</sup>
- When you do brake, use the back brake to make gradual stops. If you need to make an emergency stop, pull both brakes at the same time, pulling the front brake as light as possible to avoid flipping over.



**4 Develop a pedaling cadence of 70-90 rpm to bike efficiently.** When biking, your body is most efficient when it's pedaling a little over once per second. To develop a good pedaling pattern, turn the gears on the front of your bike until you can comfortably bike at a rate of 70-90 rotations per minute (rpm). This will require some trial and error, so switch your gears around as you start to ride to determine what works best for you.<sup>[16]</sup>

- The gears control which track the chain hangs on, which changes the amount of resistance that you experience as you pedal. They're designed to make it easier to maintain your pace while biking up or down a hill. On flat surfaces, use them to adjust how fast you need to pedal.
- Almost all racing and mountain bikes have gears.



**5 Look down the road or trail as you're biking to avoid obstacles.** To avoid running into potholes, rocks, or obstructions, look up while you're biking. Your first temptation may be to look down at your handlebar to focus on your body's motions, but this can be dangerous. Keep your eyes 90–150 feet (27–46 m) down the road or trail to avoid running into something.<sup>[17]</sup>

- It's fine if it's a little more comfortable for you to tilt your head down. Just make sure that you're looking up while you do this.



**6 Communicate with drivers by using hand signals on public roads.** To avoid startling drivers, communicate when you plan to stop or turn. To indicate that you are turning left, extend your left arm straight away from your body. For a right turn, extend your left arm and bend your elbow at a 90-degree angle pointing up. To indicate that you are stopping or slowing down, extend your left arm with your elbow bent pointing down. This way, drivers will know when you are turning, moving, or stopping.<sup>[18]</sup>

- Hand signals are made with the left arm because the right hand controls the back brake. This is the more important brake for cyclists, since the front brake should never be pulled on its own.
- If you are absolutely certain that you won't need to brake, feel free to indicate right turns by extending your right arm out.

## Method 4 of 4: Staying Motivated to Ride Regularly



**1 Begin with a smaller goal of biking 1–5 mi (1.6–8.0 km) per ride.** If you start out with a massive goal of biking 50 miles (80 km) a week, you'll struggle to reach your goal. Start out with a small, achievable goal of 1–5 miles (1.6–8.0 km) per ride. You can always work your way up to longer rides over time. Starting small will ensure that you aren't discouraged by not reaching your objective. It will also prevent injuries from the impact of long rides before your body is ready for it.<sup>[19]</sup>

- If you're really new to biking, you can start even smaller. Choose a quiet, 4-5 block route with little-to-no traffic. Practice riding that route perfectly before moving up to a longer, more difficult ride.
- Track your distance during each session using a cycling app.



**2 Bike 2-4 times a week to give your body time to heal between rides.** After your first ride, you're probably going to be quite sore. Overworking your body is a surefire way to discourage yourself from biking. Take days off between rides so that you're biking 2-4 times a week based on your level of comfort.<sup>[20]</sup>

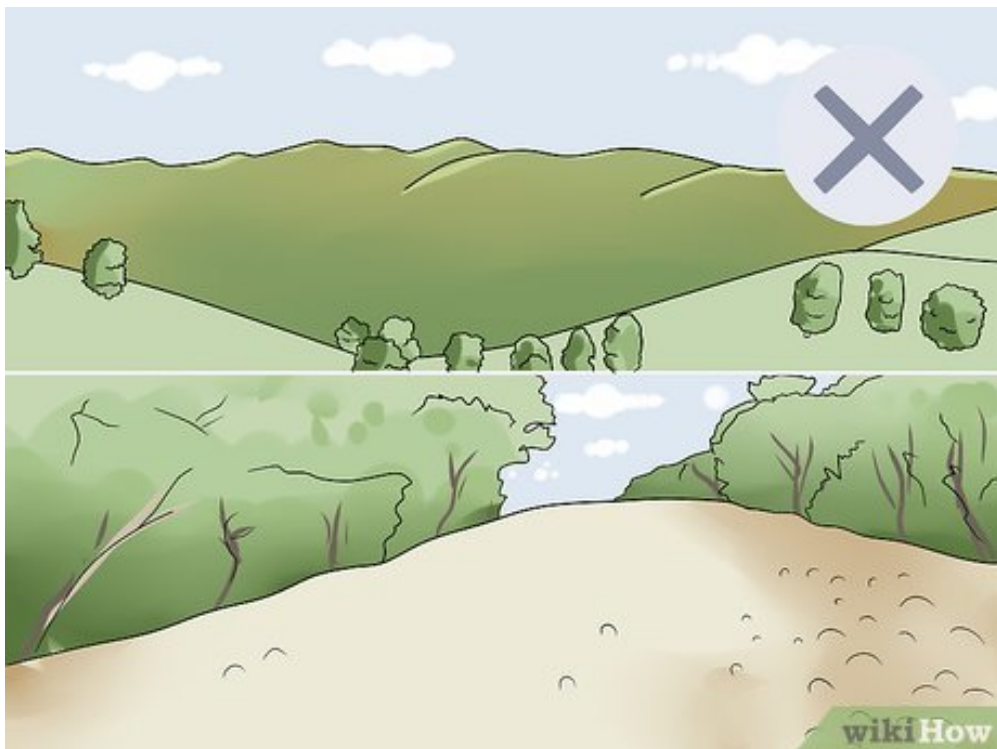
- If you're starting to bike so that you can get to work or school every day, start out by biking 2-3 times a week. Drive or take public transportation on the days that you're taking off. Work up to a full week over time.





**3 Make a habit of biking by tracking how often you ride.** It's hard to start a **new habit** if you don't have accountability. In a journal, write down how often you ride each day. Note the distance that you biked as well. Review your results at the end of the week to determine whether or not you've reached your goal. By tracking how often you actually bike, you'll know for sure whether you're getting in the swing of regularly biking.<sup>[21]</sup>

- It will become easier to reach your goal over time as you get used to cycling and tracking your progress.



**4 Avoid routes that include hills or rough terrain until you're ready.** To ensure that you don't harm yourself, stick with flat, simple routes to start off. Minimize the number of turns that you need to take and stay away from hills or rocky roads. It takes skill to navigate difficult routes; until you have some experience, you're better off playing it safe.<sup>[22]</sup>

- Staying on flat roads with few obstructions allows you to get comfortable with the act of pedaling without needing to pay attention to your terrain.





**5 Find a biking group that takes scheduled rides together.** If you find it hard to get in the habit of biking regularly, look into joining a cycling group. Cycling groups are a set of people that ride together on scheduled trips, and having a set of people to bike with will keep you motivated. Go to your local bike shop and ask around for a group to ride with. You can also search online for a beginner-level bike group that's open to new members.<sup>[23]</sup>

**Tip:** Don't jump into the deep end and join an intermediate or veteran group. You won't be able to keep up and you'll only get discouraged.



## Expert Q&A

### Question

**What is needed to start cycling?**



**Jonas Jackel**  
Owner, Huckleberry Bicycles  
Expert Answer

All you need is a bike, a helmet, and a nice empty area where you can practice your balance!

Helpful ☐ Not Helpful ☐

### Question

**How can I learn to ride a bike as an adult?**



**Jonas Jackel**  
Owner, Huckleberry Bicycles  
Expert Answer

If you never learned as a kid, I'd just take your bike out in a grassy area and practice your balance. Then you can move to an empty parking lot. You don't even need to pedal at first; just get used to sitting on the bike and moving forward. There are adult classes as well. You can always sign up for one of those!

Helpful ☐ Not Helpful ☐

### Question

## How should I set the bike up when I'm learning?



**Jonas Jackel**  
Owner, Huckleberry Bicycles  
Expert Answer

I think it's a good idea to start with the seat kind of low when you're just starting out. This way, you can always put your feet on the ground if you feel like you might fall over. It's easier to pedal with the seat higher, but that may be harder for you if you're just starting out.

Helpful 0 Not Helpful 0



### Tips

- Don't be too hard on yourself. It takes time to get in the habit of cycling regularly! It's natural to need a break every once in a while.



### Warnings

- If you live in a major city, stay away from congested areas unless they have dedicated bike lanes.
- Always wear bright or reflective clothing before you go out riding at night.

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## About This Article



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This article was co-authored by **Jonas Jackel** and by wikiHow staff writer, **Eric McClure**. Jonas Jackel is the Owner of Huckleberry Bicycles, a bicycle retail store based in San Francisco, California. Jonas has over 20 years of experience managing bicycle retail stores and has operated Huckleberry Bicycles since 2011. Huckleberry Bicycles specializes in servicing, repairing, and custom building road, cross, gravel, touring, folding, and e-bikes. Jonas was also previously sat on the Board of Directors for Bike East Bay, a bicycle-advocacy non-profit organization based in Oakland, California. This article has been viewed 15,089 times.



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