



About Bicycle Helmets

How can I tell if a helmet will keep my child safe?

You should buy only a helmet that meets the bicycle helmet safety standards of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) or the Snell Memorial Foundation. Any helmet meeting these standards is labeled. Check the inside.

Do all helmets meet ANSI or Snell standards?

No. The standards are not mandatory, so all helmets don't meet them. Some helmets are filled with soft, squishy padding, which doesn't provide good protection in accidents. Don't buy or use a helmet unless it has a label stating that it meets ANSI or Snell standards.

Can other kinds of helmets be used for bicycling?

Each type of helmet is designed for protection in specific conditions and may not offer protection in bike accidents or falls. Bike helmets are very protective in head-first falls at fairly high speeds, and are light and well ventilated for comfort and acceptability. There is only one kind of helmet a child on a bike should wear: a bicycle helmet.

Where can I get a helmet?

Helmets meeting ANSI or Snell safety standards are available at bicycle shops and at some discount, department, and toy stores in adult, toddler, and children's sizes and styles.

What are the various merits of the two types of helmets, hard shell and soft shell?

The essential part of the helmet for impact protection is a thick layer of firm polystyrene, plastic foam, that crushes on impact, absorbing the force of the blow. All helmets require a chin strap to keep them in place in a crash.

Hard-shell helmets also have a hard outer shell of plastic or fiberglass that provides a shield against penetration by sharp objects and holds the polystyrene together if it cracks in a fall or crash. These helmets are more sturdy, but tend to be heavier and warmer than the soft-shell models.

Soft-shell helmets have no hard outer shell but are made of an extra-thick layer of polystyrene covered with a cloth cover or surface coating. The cloth cover is an essential part of many soft-shell helmets. If the helmet comes with a cover, the cover must always be worn to hold the helmet together if the polystyrene cracks on impact. Both types meet ANSI and SNELL standards; the main difference is style and comfort.

American Academy of Pediatrics



While there is no consensus on the relative safety of the two types, models of both types have passed the ANSI or Snell test. The soft-shell helmets are lighter than the hard-shell versions but may be less durable.

How should a helmet fit?

A helmet should be worn squarely on top of the head, covering the top of the forehead. If it is tipped back, it will not protect the forehead. The helmet fits well if it doesn't move around on the head or slide down over the wearer's eyes when pushed or pulled. The chin strap should be adjusted to fit snugly.

Are there helmets for infants?

Yes. Many infant-sized helmets are of the soft-shell variety. They are light, an important consideration for small children whose necks may not be strong enough to comfortably hold a hard-shell helmet. Babies less than a year old have relatively weak neck structure. Neither helmets nor bike traveling is recommended for them.

How long will a child's helmet fit?

An infant's or child's helmet should fit for several years. Most models have removable fitting pads that can be replaced with thinner ones as the child's head grows.

Can a helmet be reused after an accident?

In general, a helmet that has been through a serious fall or accident should be retired with gratitude. It has served its purpose and may not provide adequate protection in another crash. If you are uncertain whether the helmet is still usable, return it to a bike shop or the manufacturer for examination.