

## Quiet Sports

### Bicycle RX: Healing Your Bike for a New Riding Season



Mud splattered the bicycle's frame. A branch had broken several spokes, and the brakes squealed as if in pain. The cycling season had barely begun, yet my bicycle was already in desperate need of healing.

By adhering to a few basic maintenance tenets, however, even the most mechanically challenged person can avoid the above scenario. First, always wipe down your bicycle after a ride. This will keep the drivetrain from wearing out and prevent steel and aluminum frames from rusting or corroding. Run a cloth around the rims; this not only removes dirt, but prevents damage to the cantilever brakes. If you have disc brakes, be sure to wipe off the calipers.

Next, do a visual check. Are the tires bulging or cracking? Is the tube poking through a rip in the tire? You may need to replace the tire.

Look for objects embedded in the tire. Removing them might cause a flat, but it is easier to fix it while at home than on a remote road or trail. Also, make sure the tire has adequate air and consider rotating the front and back tires. Since the front tire steers the bike, it wears out faster than the rear one.

After the tires have been inspected, move on to the wheels. Are they wobbly or are there broken spokes? An out-of-true wheel can rub on

the brakes or frame and can lead to a bent rim. Finally, check for loose nuts and bolts, particularly in the seat post and headset, and look for signs of wear in the brake pads.

Once a week, depending on how much you ride, you should also lube the chain. After cleaning the chain, apply bike lube to each link, let it penetrate for a few minutes, and then rub the outside of the chain with a rag until it is dry. Excessive lube on the chain can attract grime and spray onto the bike frame, creating a mess. Some bicycle experts also recommend changing the chain once a year.

In addition, cyclists can take care of their bikes by following two basic rules of pedaling. First, be sure to always ride under control, whether flying down a skinny trail or steep road. This not only saves you from accidents, but also prevents your bicycle from being damaged. And second, always be prepared by making sure your bicycle is in good condition and by carrying basic repair tools.

Finally, for those of you who are not handy with a wrench, treat your bicycle to a yearly tune-up. Under the care of a mechanic I once knew, my bike practically hummed with pleasure, operating better than when it was brand new. 🛠️

—Erin Fanning