

WELLNESS WATCH



Bicycle Helmets: Difference Between Life & Death?

(NAPSA)—As warmer days make their comeback, more and more cyclists—an estimated 48 million of them—will be taking to the streets. Osteopathic physicians (D.O.s) urge that safety should be a top priority among riders, specifically the need to wear a bike helmet.

Cycling remains one of the most popular outdoor activities in the United States. However, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, nearly one million children are treated for bicycle-related injuries in emergency rooms and other health care settings each year. Plus, an estimated 97 percent of cyclists killed in accidents were not wearing helmets.

D.O.s strongly encourage their patients to wear bicycle helmets. National statistics show that head injuries cause three out of four serious injuries and deaths that occur in bicycle accidents.

The National Safety Council provides these tips to help find a properly designed helmet:

- ✓ a stiff outer shell designed to distribute impact forces and protect against sharp objects;
- ✓ an energy-absorbing liner at least a half-inch thick;
- ✓ a chin strap and fastener that keep the helmet in place; and
- ✓ it should be lightweight, cool in hot weather and fit comfortably.

Helmets can only provide the best protection if worn properly. A helmet will be most effective if:

- ✓ it fits snugly but not tightly;
- ✓ it sits on top of riders' heads in a level position;
- ✓ it does not rock back and forth or from side to side;
- ✓ the straps are buckled; and
- ✓ it meets or exceeds the safety



Helmets are considered a key component of bicycle safety for children and adults.

standards of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, the American National Standards Institute, the Snell Memorial Foundation or the American Society for Testing and Materials.

As the number of bicyclists increases, the attitude toward wearing bicycle helmets needs to shift. Rather than seeing bike helmets as accessories, people need to think of them as necessities—items that can prevent injury and, in many cases, death.

D.O.s are fully licensed physicians able to prescribe medication and perform surgery. They treat people, not just symptoms.

To learn more about D.O.s and osteopathic medicine, visit the American Osteopathic Association's Web site at www.aoa-net.org or call toll-free 1-800-621-1773.