

The Velo Mom Beginner Road Bike Guide and Training Plan



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Gear Overview

I wanted to keep this gear section as simple as possible but the fact is that while bikes are simple compared to cars, they are not as simple as picking out a pair of running shoes or a yoga mat. You need to educate yourself on the types of bikes available, the bike lingo you'll hear at the bike shop, component types, budget realities and more.

The information below will get you started.

Do I need a road bike? Ideally you'll want a road bike. Some would say need but that's pushing it a little. If it's your first ride and you aren't sure road biking is for you borrow or rent one. Sure you will see plenty of women out there on mountain or hybrid bikes (and they will do for your first few rides) but if you are planning to **road** ride and do **road** bike events or races you'll want a **road** bike. Otherwise it's like trying to downhill ski on xc skis or run in cheap sneakers. You can do it...but it does make it fun or easy.

Where do I buy a road bike? I strongly suggest that for your first bike you go to a local bike shop. Frankly you don't know enough at this point to buy the proper bike online or on Craigslist. While those can work they can also be a waste of money if you don't know exactly what to buy. You want to make sure the bike fits you properly, and you want to establish a relationship with a local shop that can take care of your maintenance needs.

Find a shop you're comfortable with. They should be willing to spend time with you, answer your questions, and make recommendations without pushing only the best or only women specific bikes. You can also try REI or larger stores as they carry bikes.

The shop should also be willing to swap out certain parts at little or no cost to make the bike work for you – handlebar (width), stem (length) seat post (setback).

Tips on what to say at the bike shop.

1. Ask if you can speak with someone about buying a new bike. If the shop is very busy, ask if there is a better time to return or if you can make an appointment. If you are ignored after a few minutes go with your gut feeling. It could just be they are busy or it could be a sign to look elsewhere.
2. Ask about the brands they carry.
3. Discuss what type of riding you want to do and what type of bike you think you want to buy. Also discuss your budget.
4. The salesperson should now ask you some questions to determine what's the right bike for you.
5. Answer the questions and ask more as they arise.
6. Ask if you can test ride bikes.
7. Ask how they do their fittings. Ask if fitting are included in the price of the bike (it should be).
8. Ask if they're willing to switch out some parts (such as stem) to make a bike fit you.
9. Ask what their maintenance, tune-up and repair policy is. (Some shops offer a first year free tune-up.)

Types of Road Bike Frames

There are a few types of road bike frames.

- Racing – lighter weight, aggressive geometry, stiff, not very forgiving. It's for racing and going fast.
- Recreational Road Bikes – less aggressive geometry, less harsh. For club rides, beginner racing, or light credit card touring.
- Women's Specific Design (WSD) – shorter cockpit, better geometry for some women.
- Touring – more relaxed geometry, longer wheel base, braze-ons for racks & fenders and possibly an extra bottle cage. Heavier, wheels are heavier with more spokes, wider tires; and frame made of steel or

titanium – never carbon or aluminum. Buy for touring but can be used on club rides. May be slower on the climbs and descents.

- Tri bike—very aggressive geometry for aerodynamics, not good for club rides with other roadies.

Road Bike Materials

In addition to the frame you'll want to be familiar with the materials the frames are made of.

- Carbon – lightweight and very popular at the moment. Some might tell you it's not the best for your first bike but I think carbon can be a good choice if it's in your budget.
- Aluminum – lightweight, less expensive frames can be stiff & harsh. It's the most common material for less expensive road bikes.
- Steel - heavier, but more compliant, a comfortable ride, can be repaired if crashed. Think old school. It's harder to find a steel bike these days but Jamis and a few others still make stock steel road and touring frames.
- Titanium – Similar to steel in terms of comfort and ride, but doesn't corrode. If you ride in all kinds of weather or on roads that are salted in winter or you live right by the ocean where your bike might be subjected to salt spray, titanium might be a good choice...but you will pay!

What are components and what type should I get?

Components are all the things attached to the frame:

- The Drivetrain is what powers the bike (bottom bracket, crankset, chain rings, front derailleur, rear derailleur, cogset, chain, and brake/shift levers),
- Then there are brakes, cables, hubs, wheels, headset and stem.

- You will hear the term ‘grupo’ if you are buying a high-end bike. This means all the components match. It’s similar to having an outfit that’s all Prana or Patagonia. No items from Target thrown in.
- On lower end bikes, the components usually are mix-and-match with some of the drive train being low-end brand name and the rest of the components being no-name.
- The more expensive the components, the lighter they are and the smoother they feel shifting and braking. But if they are super light they can tend to break or wear out faster.

The three major component brands are:

1. Shimano – widest gear choices; now have women’s specific hoods. At the top end they offer electronic shifting. From least to most expensive: 2200, 2300, Sora, Tiagra, 105, Ultegra, DuraAce. This is the brand found on most bikes in the USA.
2. Campagnolo – I heart this brand. So much so our dog is named Campy (bike speak for the brand). It’s euro cool, but for me the easy to trim front derailleur and smaller hoods have me sold for good. They also have electronic shifting. More expensive than Shimano or SRAM. In order from least expensive to most expensive: Veloce, Centaur, Athena, Chorus, Record, Super Record. I use Chorus.
3. SRAM – newer system for road bikes, double tap shifting, double chainring paired with a mountain cassette to provide wider gear range, option for smaller hands. In order from least expensive to most expensive: Apex, Rival, Force, Red. My second favorite brand.

Wheels Wheels come stock with the bike. Later, you may decide to upgrade. The lighter the wheel, the faster it accelerates. Wheels are one of the best ways to lighten up a bike. There is a lot to learn here but for now let's stay very basic.

1. Rim size: standard road wheels have 700c rims. Small frames (46cm & under) often come with 650c rims, but this has far fewer tire choices.
2. Tire width: 23cm or 25cm for road bikes; 25, 28 or 32cm for touring.
3. Valve type: road bikes come fitted for Presta valves. Schrader valves are the thick valves like your car that come on cheaper bikes. They are not interchangeable. Make sure you buy spare tubes with the correct valve type.
4. Get tubes that fit your tire & rim. Make sure the valve stem is long enough for your rim. They come in 36mm, 48mm, and 60mm. The 36mm usually fit box rims; the 48mm fit medium aero rims (but can also be used with a box rim); the 60mm fit deep dish rims.

**Pedals
and
Shoes**

If you're serious about cycling, get clipless pedals from the beginning. Do not be intimidated, just practice on a trainer. Clipless gives you a major advantage, particularly in climbing, because you can apply power throughout the entire pedal stroke.

Road shoes vs. mountain shoes. Mountain shoes are easier to walk in, even with cleats. Road shoes may require cleat covers or you'll probably slip and/or ruin your shoes if walking far. Road shoes are usually lighter. In either case, you want a good stiff sole that transfers power directly to the pedal. Don't go for the shoes that look like sneakers.

Fitting: Get shoes with a little room to allow your feet to expand, which they will as you ride. More expensive shoes have fastening/buckle systems that can be adjusted on the fly, so you can loosen the shoe a bit if

your feet swell. I would go for these if your budget allows. I adjust mine all the time. Let the shop put the cleats on the shoes for you and do a fitting. Cleat position can be adjusted and it may take a while for you to determine the best cleat position for you.

Float – This refers to how far your foot can swivel while clipped in; this is important for knee alignment and knee health while pedaling. If your knees don't track in a straight line, the cleat should be adjusted. Float can get complicated and if you have knee issues you'll want to insure you get this set up correctly.

Gearing Several factors determine the appropriate gearing for you: age, fitness level, knees, terrain, type of riding you want to do.

You want low enough gears to get you up long and/or steep hills without strain. Generally if you are healthy and willing to train, I think you should go without really low gears for a couple of months while you build strength and form. Get a compact double chainring (34-50) with an 11-25 or 12-26 cassette. If you live in the mountains you'll want a 12-28.

But if you're just starting out and not motivated to train or think you can't push harder gears even if you train, you'll want a compact double with a cassette that goes up to at least a 28 tooth large cog, but maybe a 32, or you may want to get a triple chainring.

Budget Be realistic about your budget. Here is an idea of what you will get in a few price ranges.

- Under \$1,000—aluminum, non-brand components, heavy gearing may not be appropriate.
- \$1,000-1,500—aluminum, lower-end Shimano or SRAM components, gearing should be getting better.
- \$1,500-2,000 – aluminum or possibly carbon, low to mid-level Shimano, SRAM or Campy components,

wider choice of gearing.

- \$2,000-\$3,500—aluminum, carbon, mid to upper-level Shimano, SRAM or Campy components, wider choice of gearing.
- \$3500 and up – Better level carbon, titanium, upper-level Shimano, SRAM or Campy components, better wheels.

ID

You need to carry your ID on you when you ride. I personally prefer the [ROAD ID](#) because it's highly visible to anyone riding with you or Emergency personnel. And you will not leave it in your jersey pocket like you would your driver's license after the ride.

Repair Kit

At a minimum you should never ride a bike without a proper tube, tire levers to remove old tube, and a pump/co2 to inflate new tube. All these usually fit perfectly in a small to medium sized saddle bag.

I am urging you to not put a bag the size of your purse under your saddle. Keep it simple and compact.

Check out [Hero Kit](#) for premade road kits that save you money, time and guarantee you'll have what you need. Use code VELOMOM for free shipping.

Nutrition

Keeping it simple here. When it comes to nutrition on the bike start with two things:

1. You need more than water on rides over an hour. Electrolytes are your friend and will allow you to go longer and be more efficient. I prefer [Skratch Labs](#) drink mix. [Their website](#) is also stocked full of good advice.
2. Be sure you are eating the right energy food and at

the right time. Example: chews and blocks are good for short workouts and they are also good to eat at the middle and end of long workouts. If you are going long you'll need to eat energy bars or real food early in the process to store the correct energy for the long haul. You can learn more at [The Feed](#).

Clothing

First, find a good pair of shorts with a decent chamois. I wrote [a post](#) on buying bike shorts that will help.

Second, buy a jersey with three back pockets. Most women's jerseys will have one but trust me you need three. One for food, one for repair items that don't fit in your saddle bag (remember we are keeping that bag small enough to fit under your saddle), and one for any layers you take off during the ride.

Third, unless it never gets cold where you ride you'll want arm warmers, knee and/or leg warmers, and a lightweight jacket that will fold into that jersey pocket.

Finally, gloves and cycling specific socks should round out your cycling closet.

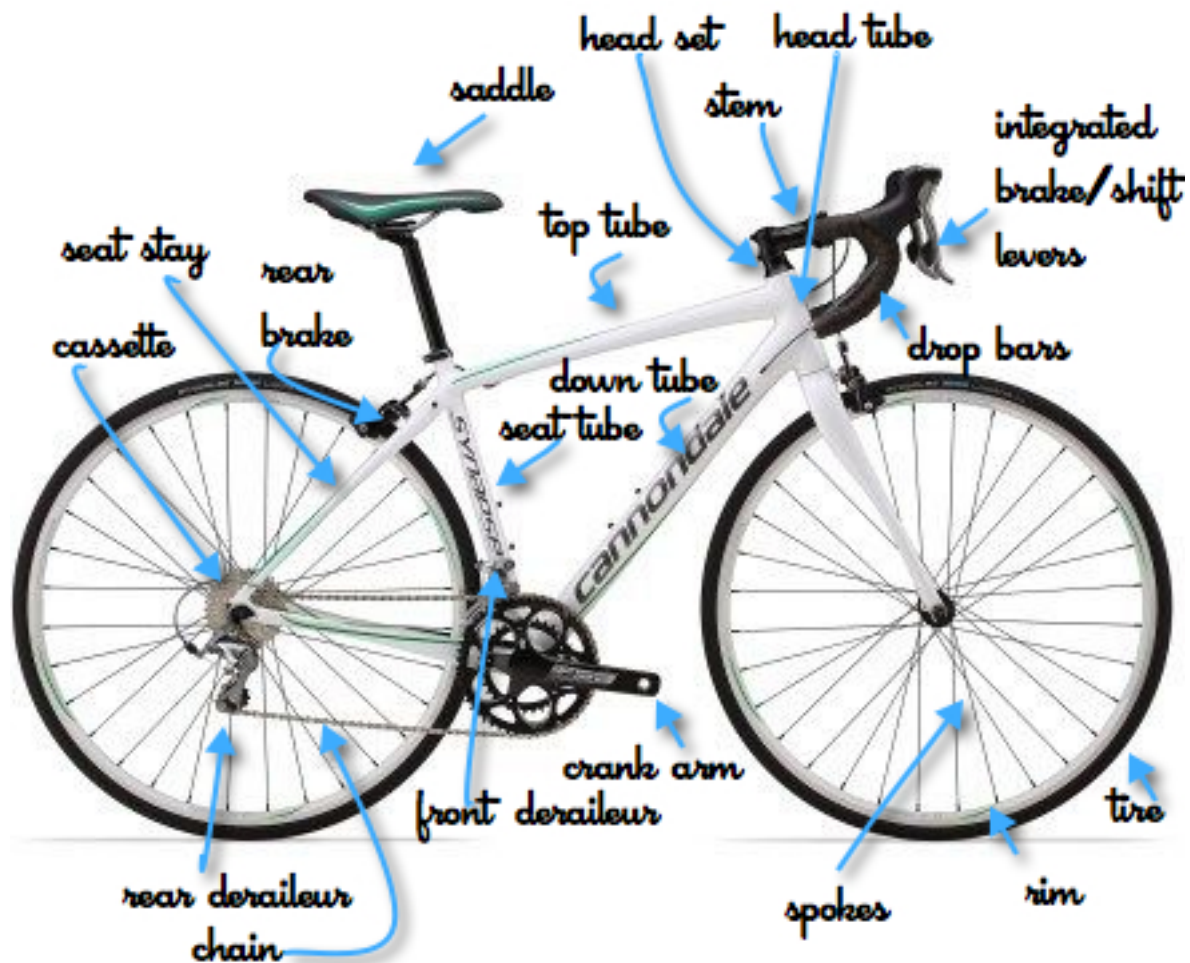
Helmet

Any helmet sold at a bike shop, no matter the price, will work. If you want to win over the roadie crowd go without a visor. Visors are traditionally for mountain biking. Usually more money equals more vents, more style and lighter weight.

Bike Anatomy

Finally it's a good idea to understand the anatomy of a road bike and the jargon a bike shop will use when they discuss bikes.

Hint: It's a saddle, not a seat.



Road Biking Basics

Before you hop out on the road there are a few things to consider about safety. Basic rules, hand signals, and group riding etiquette are essential basics.

The League of American Bicyclists has five “Rules of the Road” that will prepare you for a safe and fun bike ride no matter where or what you are riding.

FOLLOW THE LAW

Your safety and image of bicyclists depend on you. You have the same rights and duties as drivers. Obey traffic signals and stop signs. Ride with traffic; use the rightmost lane headed in the direction you are going.

BE PREDICTABLE

Make your intentions clear to everyone on the road. Ride in a straight line and don't swerve between parked cars. Signal turns, and check behind you well before turning or changing lanes.

BE CONSPICUOUS

Ride where people can see you and wear bright clothing. Use a front white light, red rear light and reflectors when visibility is poor. Make eye contact with others and don't ride on sidewalks.

THINK AHEAD

Anticipate what drivers, pedestrians, and other people on bikes will do next. Watch for turning vehicles and ride outside the door zone of parked cars. Look out for debris, potholes, and other road hazards. Cross railroad tracks at right angles.

RIDE READY

Check that your tires have sufficient air, brakes are working, chain runs smoothly, and quick release levers are closed. Carry tools and supplies that are appropriate for your ride. Wear a helmet.

Basic Hand Signals

Below are some basic hand signals you should use when riding.

Left Turn



Right Turn



Pothole/Debris



Stopping



Rules for Group Riding

Chances are you'll want to ride with a group at times to maximize your training and meet new friends. A pack (what roadies call the people in a group ride) can be intimidating at first. So arm yourself with these basics before you show up.

1. When It's your turn at the front gracefully move into position, then maintain the average pace of the group. You may be tempted to speed up but this will throw off the tempo of the group.
2. If you are in the mid-pack always point out hazards and/or announce traffic. It is every rider's responsibility to relay messages through the pack--whether you are in the front or the back.
3. In a paceline, don't overlap the rear wheel of the rider in front of you. If that happens, drift back into position carefully.
4. If you don't feel comfortable taking a pull (being at the front) always ride near the back. Not cool to ride up front and not pull your weight. Warning though: it's more dangerous and harder to keep up from the rear.
5. Make sure you choose the right group ride. Most groups have a set pace and it's up to you to ask questions to determine if it's the right fit for you.
6. When rising from the saddle to climb shift up a gear first, to adjust for a slower cadence, then pedal smoothly. If you rocket up out of the saddle you will not only look sloppy but your rear wheel will shoot backwards and potentially hit the riders behind you.
7. At intersections, it is not the lead rider's sole responsibility to get the group through safely. You must look out for your own safety.
8. Your eyes should always be focused around or beyond the riders ahead of you. Do not stare at the road, the butt or wheel directly in front of you.
9. In theory if a few riders fall off the back or stuck at a stoplight, the lead pack should soft-pedal until they rejoin the group.

Training Plan Overview

The mileages included are common for events and races. 30, 60, and 100 miles. They include three basic types of rides (endurance, strength and hard). This is on purpose as to not overwhelm you with technical jargon or details but to get your familiar with some terms used in training plans.

Each plan includes 3 days of training. This is intentional knowing that you are busy and can't devote your entire weekend to training or everyday during the week to cycling. Some 'Mom' days should be used for recovery rides that last at least 30 minutes.

Feel free to mix and match the plans depending on your skill level or time available.

If in doubt and you are completely new to exercise and cycling, go with the 30 mile plan and decrease time and miles in the beginning as needed.

Velo Mom Note:

This is a generalized and very simple plan. I am not a doctor, trainer or anyone special. Check with your doctor before training for any bike event or race if you are sure of your health. This plan does not replace the knowledge of a coach or trainer. I am not giving expert advice, only simple advice from experience, to get your started. We all need to start somewhere. I am only someone who has learned from experience and want to inspire more women to bike. I have been riding and racing for over 15 years and have worked with several high profile coaches (both Olympic medal cyclists).

For the woman with no time, I believe this plan is a good jumping off point into road biking or completing your first event/race. I raced for years (and sometimes won) without a coach or any formal plan. I found out that to really improve I did need some expert help. I love having a coach and a customized plan when I have a big goal or race. As you venture further down the road, you may want to hire a coach and get more in depth in your training. But until then, give this a try.

Be patient, be well, follow your bliss and you will do amazing!

Training Plan Descriptions

My biggest desire for new cyclists is that you embrace the cycling lifestyle. I want you to be a lifelong cyclist -- to want and need to bike. But first, cycling needs to become a habit. For the first few weeks, make your priority to get out the door and on the bike. Whether you go 5 miles or 20 mile, come home feeling happy or sad, just ride. Like anything else worth doing, you have to practice moving when you'd rather not. Eventually, it'll just become part of your routine and your body will thrive on it.

Endurance RIDE: After a few weeks you'll have a foundation of endurance to build on. You want these long rides to be at a steady pace, typically about 65 to 70 percent of your maximum heart rate (MHR*). If you don't have a heart rate monitor, think of it as a 7 on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being your maximum effort. You should be able to carry on conversation, but not be able to sing. Most cyclists find the weekends work best for endurance rides, but choose what works for you.

Strength RIDE: During these rides, you want to strive for longer intervals around 10 to 30 minutes each. These intervals should be difficult enough to increase your breathing and raise your heart rate to about 80 percent of your MHR, or an 8 on the 1 to 10 scale. Talking should be difficult after a few words. You are consistently pushing yourself. After the 10 to 30 minute interval, you'll want to give yourself 15 minutes before the next interval where you let your heart rate recover and soft pedal to relax. These rides will build your cycling strength. Depending on the time you have you should do a minimum of 2 and grow to 4 per session.

Hard RIDE: Have you heard the term lactate threshold? The only way to raise it (i.e. go longer, faster and harder) is to go hard. Short, speed intervals help raise your lactate threshold and train your heart to recover faster. The goal with speed rides is to go very hard for maximum effort intervals (a 9 to 10 on the 1 to 10 scale) for 30 seconds to 2 minutes. After you've given that maximum effort, recover by doing an easy spin for twice the amount of time.

Depending on the time and plan you should do a minimum of 3 and grow to 5 or 6 per session.

Mom DAYS: Ideally some of these will be easy, recovery ride days. It's good to spin your legs for at least 30 min especially after those hard ride days. But alas you're a Mom so do what you can here.

By slowly increasing your mileage and time in the saddle, you'll help your body get used to the mileage, hopefully stay injury free and get comfortable on your bike. Crossing a century off a bucket list is certainly a worthy goal—and not one to discourage—but the finish line will be that much better if your body and mind are ready for it.

*To figure out your maximum heart rate, take 220 minus your age. That is your predicted heart rate maximum. Then take that number and multiply it by the various percentages, i.e. 60% or 70%. That is the goal for your heart rate for the specific training day.

*If you prefer to be accurate you can purchase a heart rate monitor and/or GPS. The nice thing about a bike specific GPS is that you can monitor heart rate, speed, cadence, mileage, calories and also upload your progress to sites like Strava or Map My Ride.

I use the [Garmin 500](#). It's a great GPS to manage your rides and the bundle includes a heart rate monitor strap.

Velo Mom 8 week Training Plan - 30 miles

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8
Monday MOM DAY								
Tuesday HARD	20 min.	20 min.	30 min.	40 min.	45 min.	50 min.	40 min.	Recover
Wednesday MOM DAY								
Thursday STRENGTH	30 min.	40 min.	45 min.	50 min.	50 min.	60 min.	50 min.	30 min.
Friday MOM DAY								
Saturday ENDURANCE	30 min. 8-9 miles	45 min. 11-13 miles	45 min. 11-13 miles	60 min. 13-15 miles	60 min. 13-15 miles	90 min. 15-20 miles	90 min. 20 miles	2 hours 25-30 miles
Sunday MOM DAY								

Notes:

- Click [here](#) to launch a larger PDF of this plan. One you can actually read.
- This is only a suggested schedule. Switch days if needed.
- These times and mileage will vary based on terrain.
- Use Mom days as you need but try to get in some recovery rides during the week.

Velo Mom 8 week Training Plan - 60 miles

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8
Monday MOMDAY								
Tuesday HARD	30 min.	30 min.	40 min.	45 min.	45 min.	60 min.	45 min.	Recover
Wednesday MOMDAY								
Thursday STRENGTH	30 min.	45 min.	45 min.	60 min.	1.5 hours	1.5 hours	1.5 hours	60 min.
Friday MOMDAY								
Saturday ENDURANCE	60 min 13-15 miles	60-90 min 15-18 miles	90 min 15-20 miles	2 hours 25-30 miles	2-2.5 hours 30-35 miles	3 hours 35-40 miles	3-4 hours 45-50 miles	4-5 hours 60 miles
Sunday MOMDAY								

Notes:

- Click [here](#) to launch a larger PDF of this plan. One you can actually read.
- This is only a suggested schedule. Switch days if needed.
- These times and mileage will vary based on terrain.
- Use Mom days as you need but try to get in some recovery rides during the week.

Velo Mom 8 week Training Plan - 100 miles

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8
Monday MOMDAY								
Tuesday HARD	1 hour	1 hour	1.5 hours	1.5 hours	1.5 hours	1.5 hours	1 hour	Recover
Wednesday MOMDAY								
Thursday STRENGTH	1 hour	1.5 hours	1.5 hours	2 hours	2 hours	2.5 hours	2 hours	1.5 hours
Friday MOMDAY								
Saturday ENDURANCE	1.5-2 hours 20-25 miles	2 hours 25-30 miles	2.5-3 hours 35-40 miles	2.5-3 hours 35-40 miles	3-3.5 hours 45-50 miles	4 hours 60-65 miles	5-6 hours 70-80 miles	6-8 hours 100 miles
Sunday MOMDAY								

Notes:

- Click [here](#) to launch a larger PDF of this plan. One you can actually read.
- This is only a suggested schedule. Switch days if needed.
- These times and mileage will vary based on terrain.
- Use Mom days as you need but try to get in some recovery rides during the week.
- Check out these 100 mile nutrition tips from [The Feed](#).

Event Day Checklist

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| A few days before the event | Make sure you have all your gear, food, and that your bike is tuned and ready to go. Think about feeling great on the event day and completing the event injury free. Eat well and focus on carbs! |
| Day Before | Drink, drink, drink (not wine)! Eat a good balanced meal. Read the event director's emails and review the website to know the details and times. Fill up water bottles. |
| Morning | Remember that this is fun! Try to eat breakfast 2-3 hours before your start. Locate the port-o-potties! You'll be glad you did. |
| Event | Stay Calm, keep pedaling, have fun. Smile and enjoy the scenery and the other participants. Stop at the aid stations. Don't worry if you are going slower than you wanted. Just finish. |
| Post-Event | Enjoy the endorphin high! Congratulate yourself and indulge in that post-event meal. |