

## Avoiding Common Bike Crashes, from Bicycling Magazine



Photo: Mark Cavendish crashed hard in the final kilometers of Stage 4 at the 2012 Tour de France. (Getty Images)

### Overlapped Wheels

**How it happens:** Your front wheel passes the rear wheel of the rider in front of you, shrinking the amount of space and time you have to respond to whatever he does—and increasing the odds of bumping into him. "A guy at the front moves over 4 inches, and at the back it's 4 feet," says [Tim Johnson](#), a pro who races for [Cyclocrossworld.com](#). On Stage 9 of the [Tour de France](#) in 2011, [Alberto Contador](#) overlapped wheels with Katusha's Vladimir Karpets. When Karpets inadvertently bumped him, Contador crashed and injured his knee—a mishap that may have contributed to his subpar finish.

**Avoid it:** Watch the pack so that you know when riders up front are slowing. Overlaps often happen on corners, when riders scrub speed; anticipate by coasting a bit into the corner. Leave enough room so that if the rider in front of you stands—which pushes his bike back underneath him about 6 inches—he won't overlap your front wheel.

**Too late?:** Feather the rear brake. Coast a pedal stroke or two. Don't swerve; the rider behind you is depending on your line. A bump won't necessarily knock you over. Practice absorbing contact in a park on your mountain bike, using flat pedals. Ride next to a friend and have him lightly bump you on your hip, says Roger Young, a multitime Olympian who teaches track racing at the [Home Depot Center Velodrome](#) in Los Angeles. Focus on holding your line with your hips, not your handlebar. If you try to correct course using the bar, you'll veer off in the direction of the bump. But correct at the hips and the bike will follow.



### Keeping Your Head Down

**How it happens:** During Stage 1 of the Tour, Astana's Iglinsky was riding at the edge of the pack on the shoulder. In a moment of inattention, he clipped a spectator, causing a domino-style crash that cost Contador and several other contenders more than a minute. "Sometimes we get too confident in the group," says Young. Riders also are prone to this when tired or distracted, leaving them vulnerable to the sudden appearance of pedestrians, parked cars, dogs, even garbage cans.

**Avoid it:** Stay alert, always, even on familiar routes. Stop for caffeine if you need it. Fatigue can compromise pedaling, which profoundly affects your stability. Make sure your bike fits properly: You'll be less likely to ride with a slumped posture.

**Too late?:** Brake smoothly and stay in a straight line, especially on a group ride. Set your weight back a bit; it'll help keep the bike upright and straight. If there's an obstacle ahead, try to lift your front wheel over it. If it's something like a garbage can, try to hit it with your hip first; it's closest

## Hazardous Corners

**How it happens:** Let us count the ways: An eddy of gravel or debris washed up in the bend. You're carrying too much speed. It's wet. You hit a slick painted line.

**Avoid it:**

1. Be sensible and prioritize good form over sheer speed. If every corner is life or death, you'll be tense, which is counterproductive.
2. Keep your head up and look as far through the turn as you can. Avoid drifting through a left-hand turn and cutting across the turn lanes; you risk getting hit by oncoming traffic. Brake early, in the straightaway before the turn. Initiate the turn late and aim for a late apex; this keeps you from cutting across traffic and straightens out your exit.
3. Don't grab the brakes in a turn. You'll put extra force on the tires and push yourself to the outside of the turn.
4. If the roads are wet, let some air out of your tires. If you normally run them at 100 psi, go down to 90 to increase the amount of rubber on the road.

**Too late?:** Worst case if you cut across a left-hand turn, you'll surprise someone coming at you in the turn lane. Stand the bike up to go straight—to the outside of the turn—then apologize to anyone behind you. If you have, say, gravel in your line and can't avoid it, just go through. "Stand the bike up slightly and point it straight," says Johnson. "Only change your line once you're through the debris."

## Half-Wheeling

**How it happens:** You're riding slightly ahead of the person next to you in a group or double [paceline](#). The misaligned paceline, and the surges and ebbs in speed that result, can cause crashes behind you.

**Avoid it:** Match gearing and cadence with the rider next to you. Stay away from hero pulls and other surges. It pisses off the people behind you, too.

**Too late?:** Soft-pedal a stroke or two to come even again. If the guy beside you surges, don't accelerate to meet him; he'll only creep ahead again each time you come even. Instead, hold the pack's pace and let him come back to you.

## Riding Tense

**How it happens:** If you're tight, every movement is magnified, says Young. You can't react quickly, and when you do the reaction is exaggerated, which can send you into riders or obstacles around you.

**Avoid it:** Proper bike fit? That's step one. Now, go ride at a velodrome. With the fixed-gear, brake-free bike and pack of others, you'll develop spatial awareness and field vision, and learn to scrub speed smoothly, stay locked on a wheel without fixating on it, and trade pulls. Most velodromes offer a basic track class with rentals. "Probably 85 percent of the people who ride here don't race track at all," says Young. "They just want to be better cyclists." No track nearby? Get a fixed-gear errand bike and try to use the drivetrain more than the hand brake. Bike polo also improves handling.

**Too late?:** Shake out your arms and roll your neck and shoulders. If you're riding on the brake hoods, hook your index and middle fingers over the front of the brakes; it's hard to put on a death grip with your pinkie. Change your hand position periodically.

## Road Hazards

**How it happens:** You or someone else hits a pothole or fishtails in gravel. Crashes in groups often look like ripples on a pond—one small move radiates outward, expanding, until someone's down.

**Avoid it:** The safest spot to ride is almost always up front. In midpack, look ahead, beyond the rider in front of you. In turns, stay inside—physics takes crashes to the outside, so avoid the debris fan.

**Too late?:** Don't get caught gawking as the first rider goes down. Focus on an exit strategy--a way around or through the trouble ahead. What if riders are crashing around you? Point the bike straight, level the pedals, and flex your knees and elbows. You'll absorb impacts better and offer yourself a chance to ride out of the carnage.