



NHS

Bristol

Life Cycle  UK

“I was unaware
of the ice...”

stories from the hard shoulder of cycling

think **twice***
cycling in icy weather

thinktwice* case studies

Not everyone who cycles in frozen conditions will slip and fall, but working age commuter cyclists have told us that slipping on ice is the most common cause of non-collision cycling incidents.

Their stories are presented here to help highlight the hazard and how it can best be avoided or reduced. These are the personal experience and opinions of the individuals involved. Readers will need to make their own judgements about the advice they offer about cycling in extreme weather conditions.

For further information, see:
www.lifecycleuk.org.uk/think-twice-cycling-in-icy-weather

Clive, Settle, North Yorkshire

“17 December 2009 – the start of the big freeze that year. It snowed, then melted into slush, then froze hard. I was riding my normal bike – a drop bar light tourer with 700c 28 road tyres. I noticed it was a bit slidy as I rode up the gentle hill into Settle, slipping the rear wheel occasionally, heading for a swine flu jab.

The last bit before my destination is an ever-so-slight downhill before a right turn. I was riding very slowly (5mph or so – it was obviously quite slippery), and I think while setting up for the corner I might have touched the front brake ever so slightly with the wheel not straight, and it gave up and dumped me unceremoniously on my side with no time to react.

After the initial rush of pain subsided I got up, tried to walk across the road, but decided there was something badly wrong with my leg and sat down, then lay down in the snow. Passers by fetched blankets after a while, and even a hot wheat bag. (space blankets didn't help – proper thick ones made a difference).

A bit over an hour later the ambulance made it, and we had an exciting trip to hospital 30-odd miles away, passing all the stuck traffic, slipping around a bit, and having to change ambulances at a jackknifed lorry.

I had a broken hip (femur). Next day I had an operation to put three screws in, I was released from hospital about three days

later, and was on crutches and occasional wheelchair for three months – not allowed to put any weight on that leg.

For at least a year after that, my riding was a lot more paranoid about slippery conditions. I've learned the difference between snow and ice – snow is relatively friendly, especially on a bike with knobby tyres. If it's likely to be icy, I now stick to the main road rather than using back roads, and I've been using cyclocross tyres as well (much more grip in iffy conditions than the slicks). And I have a set of proper studded tyres ready for the next time it freezes.

I was asked why I wasn't wearing a helmet by the ambulance people, who didn't seem to notice that I'd not hit my head in a pretty much worst-case sideways fall (no hand flung out to catch me, so no broken wrist or collarbone which are the more classic injuries for this sort of accident).”

Dugald

“I commute by bike (7 miles each way) throughout the year as parking is extremely limited and the bus network doesn't adequately cover my route to work. My route is generally on road, with certain stretches on cycle tracks. Cycle tracks are normally regarded as the safer option than roads but I have learned to be wary of them in icy conditions. Why? Because roads get gritted whereas cycle tracks don't. And it was for this

reason that I came off my bike one winter morning on the ride to work.

After travelling most of the way on gritted roads, I normally transition on to the cycle track for the last few sections as this tends to be faster, bypassing a series of traffic lights. At the first corner of the cycle track, my bike suddenly slid out from under me with no warning and no chance to correct. Thankfully, my injuries were minor compared to that of my ego. What did I learn? Well I learned to respect that particular corner for a start, but even when going at walking pace I've almost slipped over since then, and so now I just stay on the gritted road and crawl with the traffic rather than risk injury. Although I tend to get annoyed when stuck in queues of traffic, adding a minute or two to my journey is definitely better than coming off the bike.

As a final little extra about winter cycling, although I choose gritted roads over icy cycle paths, the mixture of salty grit and melt water is extremely corrosive on the bike (specially the chain) so make sure you wash your bike down at least weekly, preferably daily. And I never ride on the roads in snowy conditions, especially if it's at a depth where cars are forming ruts in the snow as if I were to slip over, there would be little chance of a following car being able to avoid me.

Stay safe, always wear a helmet and hi-viz clothing, and make sure your lights work for those dark commutes.”



“...I had ridden about 10 miles when I encountered a patch of black ice and hit the ground very suddenly.”

Peter, Leighton Buzzard

“I think it was an early December day and I was cycling to work. I have now retired but I used to do a 25 mile round trip from Aylesbury to Leighton Buzzard about three times a week and have done for the last 25 years, so as you can tell I am an experienced cyclist. On the day of the fall the roads were generally dry but I was aware that there could be patches of ice as I had seen some icy patches in the gutter, so I was riding cautiously.

At about 8.30am I had ridden about 10 miles when I encountered a patch of black ice and hit the ground very suddenly. This was in a rural location where the roads may not have been gritted and the temperature was probably lower than at home in town. At the point where I fell the road was straight and I was riding in a straight line, but there were significant longitudinal dips in the road surface where vehicles usually travel. I was unaware of the ice and I think that my front wheel slid down the slope of the dip in the road taking my bike from under me. I had no time to react and landed heavily on my right side on my hand, shoulder, hip and knee. I was wearing a cycle helmet, which was slightly marked, gloves and cycling gear.

I was shaken but after walking a short distance was able to continue cycling the last three miles to work. I intended to cycle home but finding that I had stiffened and my hand had swollen, and not relishing a

ride home in the dark I got a lift home with my bike. I did not go to work the next day; I think that I was in shock as I felt tired and shivery and just wanted to keep warm and rest. My right hand was swollen and painful but several X rays could find no broken bones. I had little strength in my hand and some movements were painful; I could not unscrew jar lids for example. I visited a private sports physiotherapist for advice and the hand took several months to regain normal strength. Grazes to my knee and hip healed in a week or two.

As I tried to regain fitness on my bike in the following Spring, I found that I had an ache down my right leg and could not develop much strength. Eventually I visited a sports physiotherapist again who thought that I had slightly dislocated my right hip in the fall, affecting a nerve. He manipulated me, without any bone crunching or pain, but from that time my right leg gradually recovered its strength.

After that experience I have been much more cautious about cycling if there is a risk of ice and used the car more during the winter as a result. At my age, 61 now and probably nearly 60 at the time of the accident, it takes longer to recover from injury so I feel I need to be more careful than when I was younger.”

Alan, Tameside

“From what I can remember, this incident happened about 10–12 years ago. I was doing my usual early morning 12 mile commute to work via main roads and country lanes. The morning was dry, sunny, cold with the possibility of black ice on untreated roads. I travelling along a country lane and approaching a ‘T’ junction coming up to a main road when the incident happened. As I approached the junction I applied the brakes to slow down and hit some black ice. The back end of the bike went from underneath me. Luckily the rear pannier on the bike took most of the force of the fall so I escaped any sort injury.”

Reg, Bristol

“I was cycling from Bristol central to Little Stoke. I was cycling along Folly Lane and turned into George Jones Road when I hit black ice – slipped, fell and slid across the road. Luckily there was no oncoming traffic. As it was very cold, I was well padded. This saved me from injury including bruising. On my return trip I got off the bike at this point. Even then it was difficult to stand – it was that slippery. It affected the way I cycle. Now, in freezing conditions I try to give myself as much warning of slippery conditions ahead by ‘dabbing’ the back brake when I suspect a slippery area to test how much grip is present.”

Kirsten, Edinburgh

“I generally commute by bike and I’m lucky because an off-road tarmac path (shared-use bike/pedestrians) runs almost from my front door to work – I have less than a mile to do on roads. In December 2009 I had set off to work without noticing that it was icy – the road I live on is quite busy with traffic day and night so ice often doesn’t get a chance to settle. But once I’d got round the corner I realised it was icy – although not until the bike had gone from under me and I’d found myself sitting on black ice on tarmac. Luckily there was nothing behind me so I didn’t get squashed. I had a badly bruised coccyx. We don’t know if it was broken because they don’t like to do pelvic x-rays on women unless they absolutely have to. A week or so of good painkillers and a month of sitting on pressure cushions helped but it remained intermittently painful for the next few months. The previous year my neighbour had come off his bike on ice, broken bones in his foot, been quite immobile and then developed a deep vein thrombosis and nearly died.

I’m now very wary of cycling when it’s icy. Apart from the risk of coming off the bike and hurting myself, there’s the risk of coming off the bike and being squashed by a lorry, and the risk of being hit by a motor vehicle skidding out of control. I must admit, if I think there’s a chance of ice, I get the bus now.”



“Overtook a tricycle and made a jokey comment about having the right vehicle for the conditions. Front wheel slipped sideways... Fell on side.”

Sally, Portsmouth

“My slipping-on-ice incident happened in the winter of 2009 (early December, I think) about 8am, I was riding a road bike with slick tyres. I was taking the shared cycle/foot path underpass to cross the M27/A27 roundabout in Portsmouth. I came off my bike at the green arrow, a sharp right-hand bend on a downhill incline with adverse camber. Since the incident I’ve discovered the path is never gritted, even if it snows. I’ve seen several other people caught out by the same corner.

I now avoid pavement-based cycle paths in icy/snowy conditions and ride on the road. (I normally avoid cycling on the road at that roundabout because it’s a fairly exciting experience even in a car!)”

David, Twickenham

“1. Cycling to work. In very slow line of traffic on main road. As the line came to a halt I moved very gently left into the cycle lane in order to pass it. Speed was around walking pace. The cycle lane was covered in glassy ice. As soon as the front wheel touched it, it slid to the left. I fell on to my right side, landing on hip and ribs. No injuries other than slight bruising. No damage to cycle.

2. Cycling home from work on very icy side road, travelling at about 10–12mph. The ice was flat and glassy. Overtook a tricycle and made jokey comment

about his having the right vehicle for the conditions. Front wheel slipped sideways while not attempting any manoeuvre. Fell on side. No injuries or damage. Had a chuckle with the tricyclist as he repassed me a few seconds later.

3. Cycling home on very icy side road. The ice was thick and uneven. Riding extremely slowly and carefully but the wheels again slipped sideways. No injuries or damage. The surface was so slippery it was difficult to stand up again in cycling shoes and walk. Continued pushing bike with great difficulty until end of the section with broken ice.

I can’t say these minor falls affected my cycling at all. I continued commuting by bicycle throughout the icy spell, but then I’m an experienced cyclist and probably not typical. I even managed a 200km Audax ride on the last day of January (without falling), but by then the ice was only really a problem in the hillier bits.”

David, Bristol

“There’s nothing to tell, I’m afraid. I didn’t think it was frosty, and mainly it wasn’t, but I found a patch!

On the same day my wife’s grandmother fell (not off her bike!) for the same reason.”

Ian, Potters Bar

“I cycle every day 10 miles each way to work from Potters Bar to Colindale in North London, and had done for many years, summer and winter. The route include a 5-mile stretch of the A1 which is a three lane dual carriage way. On a cold mid February day, frost on the fields but roads dry and frost free, I was on the A1 cycling downhill towards Mill Hill when I hit a long stretch of black ice, completely invisible to the eye. The ice was caused by water run off from the grass verge which froze when it ran down the road. My wheels slipped from under me and I slid along the road for many yards suffering a broken wrist and severe grazing on my right thigh and buttock. I was hospitalised for about four days.

Fortunately there were no vehicles close behind me at the time but when I was waiting for the ambulance several cars were sliding as they hit the long patch of ice. I have cycled and driven along this stretch many times previously and since but never seen a similar ice run off. Now, if it is very frosty, even if the roads look dry, I drive to work.”

David

“It was in early December (I was 58 years old at the time). Like any seasoned cyclist, I had read the weather report the day before and the prediction was for below freezing temperatures, so I’d resolved to walk to work.

When I looked at the road surface outside my house the next morning however, I couldn’t see any ice, so I decided to risk it. There is a ferocious slope on the road outside my house. Strangely, I remember getting to the end of the road without incident. The next thing I remembered was looking into the relieved face of an ambulance man. I was wearing my helmet at the time, and the mutual conclusion we came to is that I had hit a patch of black ice and my bike had skidded from under me. The pain of my outstretched hand hitting the tarmac had caused me to temporarily black out. I went to A&E to discover I’d broken the bone in between my wrist and little finger. I play piano in my spare time and tried not to think of the outcome.

The medics told me that if my hand was left to heal without any surgery, I would recover full use of my hand/fingers. Sure enough it’s now as good as it was before the accident. I now have what’s known as a dropped knuckle, a common injury in bare knuckle fighting, apparently.

What are my thoughts on the incident? I was extremely lucky not to have sustained any permanent injury from the incident. Ever since then, if I see the slightest twinkle of ice crystal anywhere on the road surface I’m on foot. I’ve briefly thought of fitting spiked tyres, but the remotest chance that I could slip on ice again has caused me to vow never to cycle on icy roads again.”

“...I have ordered snow tyres for my bike... which hopefully will grip better on snow and ice.”

Henry

“I have had a few spills on ice but never done any real damage other than putting a few holes in my clothing and cuts and scrapes.

It never happens on days that you might expect, those really really cold ones or when its been snowing because that's when it obvious when there is going to be ice about. I ride a road bike on most days and so not much tread on the tyres so it doesn't take much to lose grip.

It's those days when it may have been quite damp overnight and the temperature has dropped just enough for black ice to form. You cant see it and you're not expecting it so when you lean the bike over in a turn it catches you out and down you go. Because you're not expecting it you don't have time to react and so it always end up with me sprawled on the road (or cycle path). Luckily it has never happened with a car close behind me or coming towards me but that's always something that goes through my mind.

I think I do what most other riders would do after a few incidents like that, as soon as I feel a slight wobble or slide then I back right off, unclip a foot and try and keep the bike as upright as possible.”

Toby, Bath

“I had just flown directly back from Sydney, Australia, landed at LHR at 5am on about 22 December 2009. Got home to Bath on train, had a cup of tea and picked up my bike to go to work. Probably tiredness was a factor!

I rode 50 meters down my road, it was a cold morning (still below 0°C) and turned left. As I did so my front wheel hit black ice and I came off. My right hand was badly gashed, I think by stones on the road. It bled a lot, I went home, put a plaster on (bit shocked) and took bus to work! The wound would not stop bleeding, so that night (about 10 hours after the crash) I went to the NHS walk in centre in Bath, who were excellent. They cleaned all the dirt out and stitched it (3 stitches). The wound was deep – you could see my tendons to my thumb. Unfortunately it became infected, so 2 days alter I went back, they put on a silver based dressing. The wound then healed (though still bled every time I knocked it). It took about 2 weeks to heal.

In consequence, this winter I have ordered snow tyres (Schwalbe snow stud) for my bike, which contain small titanium carbide spikes – which hopefully will grip better on snow and ice. We'll see!”

Claire

“I was commuting to work, which is about a 7-mile ride. On the week before the slip there had been a lot of snow (early 2010). The day I slipped the snow had gone but there had been a frost, so I'd spent most of the ride to work avoiding anything frosty. I cycled up a footpath on to a road that sloped slightly uphill. There was a large pool of water caused by water flowing down the road and accumulating against a speed hump at the bottom of the slope. I rode through the pool and continued up the slope, which turned out to be covered in black ice. I slipped so fast and that there was no time to react, I just went from vertical to horizontal.

Fortunately I was wearing a helmet, because I banged my head on the road and saw stars. I got up as quickly as possible and pulled the bike off the road on to the verge, then almost immediately a van went past me and slid diagonally across the road into the hedge on the opposite side. No-one was hurt.

I walked up the rest of the road along the verge, then had to flag down cars and another cyclist to warn them as the junction of the road was also covered in black ice. Apart from the bang on the head I had also landed on the point of my shoulder very hard, and damaged the ligaments, but no other injury apart from bruises.

Since then I have been ultra-cautious if there is any possibility of ice on the road and prefer to get off and walk. If the road conditions are bad I leave the bike at home and go by car. I'm very conscious of the fact that a skidding car could hit me on the bike, even if I don't skid myself, having seen how narrowly the van missed me on the day I fell.”

Mary, Oxford

“The temperature was about -3°C and mainly dry. The time was 6.45am. Due to potholes and parts of the road in need of repair there were patches of ice where cars had splashed water across the road. In this case there was a stretch of ice across the road, the vehicle in front of me went into a fence, and although going very carefully the bike just slid. With hindsight (a wonderful thing) I should have got off and walked or even not have been cycling with the temperature below freezing.

I now would not cycle with the temperature below freezing especially in the dark. All this was in aid of getting the miles in before doing LEJOG in May. Fortunately although I broke my elbow we were able to complete the End to End, a fabulous holiday.

I live 7 miles west of Oxford and regularly cycle to work in Abingdon. For the record I am 63!”

“Crisp, clear, wintry mornings are fantastic and I will continue to venture out, knowing the risks.”



Malcolm, South Manchester

“1. Cycling to work on a cold morning I’d checked to see if any ice was about, the car on the drive was ice-free and a walk down the drive on to the road showed no ice, so the bike came out and off I went to work. I live on an estate so I have to navigate through a number of side roads before the main road I was just turning right onto the last of the side roads when I looked down and saw the rear wheel coming round to my left. Various expletives flashed through my mind, before I had chance to work out what was happening I was going down. As an aside, when I was at school we had a great PE teacher who taught us how to land from a fall. So 45 years later I found out it really works, going down on your back, head up (I DO wear a helmet!) get as flat as possible, arms out stretched. Thump! There we are down. Easy. Right shoulder took the bulk of the fall but no damage, other than a scratch to the right hand brake lever (the rear changer escaped damage due to the fact I had a single pannier on that side and that took the impact at that end.

The morning was cold. It was about 6am, The road surface was wet, there was adequate street lighting, no other persons were involved, my speed would have been about 8mph or just a bit less but certainly above 6mph. This was my first Winter on a bike after a break of about 40 years from cycling. And would have been early 2009

and the culprit black ice. I walked back to look and the surface was really slippery. We live and learn!

2. Saturday morning I think it was February 2010 and I needed to go to some local shops about 3 miles away. I decided I would take a trip through the local park. This was about 9.30am. The weather was clear and bright, blue skies, sun was out, the roads were damp in places, my journey took me via the main roads to another estate where I would turn off down a side road and into the local park. As I approached the park I could see the track quite clearly, very little deviation is required to get from the road to the track, I slowed down to negotiate the entrance (just two vertical stumps to allow pedestrians and cyclists through) and I was on the track. At the entrance the track is covered by a number of mature trees and the track itself is made up from crushed limestone, as I emerged out from under the tree cover I noticed that I was on solid ice. At that point I knew I was going down and had time to plan it... about 3 seconds. LOL go to the right as there was a drop off on the left, plan A went into action – head up land flat arms out, easy – hey I’m getting good at this. I went down the track on my back with arms and legs in the air like an upturned woodlouse. Right hand brake lever collected scratch number two and the pannier saved the rear mech again.

On this occasion I noticed a severe crease in the side of my helmet on this occasion my head hit the track and the helmet took the impact the crease is about 40mm long about 6mm wide and about 2mm deep, so on a serious note that really did save me a trip to A&E. I was on a lonely track out of sight to any other person, who knows what might have happened had I not had the helmet on?

It hasn’t affected my attitude to ice as I always try to be careful, If it is icy I won’t go out on the bike. But I am more aware of black ice. I ride a Giant SCR 1.5 and to date I’ve ridden over 14,000 miles since June 2008 and have ended twice, LEJoG in 2009 and JoGLE this year.”

Andrew

“I was travelling to work one morning, probably around 8.30am, along a back road I used to use as a short cut as it was not used much by cars. The part of the road I slipped on was a bend in the road in the shade. The road looked fairly ice-free but the bike went from under me on the bend, luckily I was not travelling fast and there was no traffic around. My injuries were fairly superficial as I remember, if any, apart from possible bruising.

I no longer use this route to work, not because of the road conditions but because my place of work has since changed. It has not put me off cycling in icy conditions as the main roads tend to be clear, but I do not cycle in the snow.”

Martin

“I was on the way home, at about 9am, from an early Sunday morning cycle in November. I had gone out – as is my habit on an A road, and was now returning on back roads. Though I was aware it had been below zero in the night, the roads seemed to be dry and ice free. The minor roads had been initially open moorland roads, but I then passed through a short wooded section. On a corner at the bottom of a short hill the road went round a corner under some trees – I hit some ice and my front wheel skidded out from under me. Being in Winter cycling gear meant that my injuries were limited to some nasty grazes on an elbow and my hip. Though I ended up with a huge bruise on my hip and a limp for a week or so. My bike was fine and I was able to cycle home (sorely).

On reflection, the ice was on the road either because the road surface was in the shade so the sun hadn’t melted the ice away, or it stayed damp under these trees, giving ice a chance to form.

Though the obvious choice is to stay on A roads which are gritted on icy mornings, the pleasure of cycling for me comes in part from riding on quiet back roads with minimal traffic. Crisp, clear, wintry mornings are fantastic and I will continue to venture out, knowing the risks. In all weathers, I now slow down on this particular corner ... once bitten twice shy!”

“In some respects I would consider walking on ice more dangerous than cycling on it... if riding a bicycle I would at least be wearing a helmet.”

Roger

“A cycling route from home to work is very familiar. One knows not only the route, but also the appropriate speed at which each corner or other change in direction can be taken.

On a day when everywhere is covered in ice it is obvious that extreme caution is needed, or that one should use a different mode of transport. However, when the temperature is, or has recently been, below freezing, but there is no obvious ice when starting the journey, there may nonetheless be unexpected patches of ice in a few places, particularly where there is shade.

If one now takes a corner at the usual speed, but encounters even a very small patch of ice part way round the corner, the sideways frictional force needed to keep the cycle accelerating sideways round the corner is suddenly removed, and the wheels slip towards the outside of the curve leaving the cyclist sliding along the ground on his side. A patch of ice 10cm in diameter and 1 mm thick is easily sufficient to cause this.

The safe speed to go round such a corner in the presence of ice may easily be ten times lower than the usual speed.

Despite the fact that cars are also affected by ice, they are much less affected than cycles by small patches of ice, because of a) no requirement to balance when you have 4 wheels; b) much larger area in

contact with ground makes it more likely that some area of at least three wheels will encounter surface with normal friction.”

Rich

“The accident occurred early morning before sunrise before the road had been used much by traffic (6.45am) on a straight section of road which I regularly ride on. I often ride even when I can see the road twinkling as it’s a section that’s normally gritted. I can’t really walk instead of cycling just because the temperature falls below zero overnight. We are close to the coast so it’s usually a little milder than in inland Kent. The only days I didn’t cycle were when there was snow around and to be honest it would have been safer to cycle than walk as the pavements took far longer to lose their iciness than the roads did.

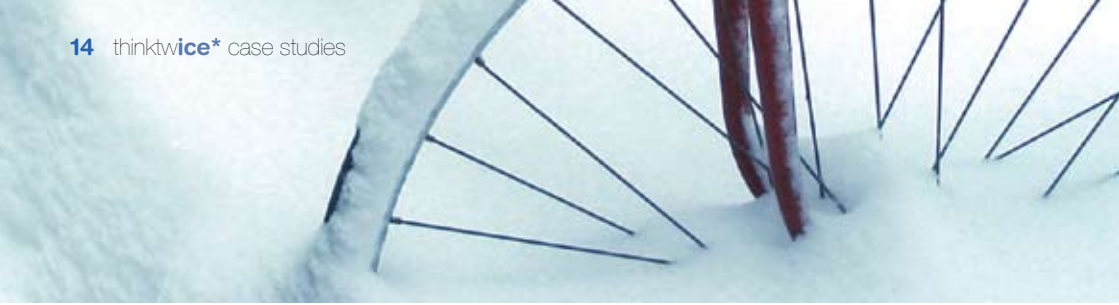
Anyway, when I fell off I got right up again and tried to warn an approaching car of the danger of the black ice but they continued oblivious to the danger and suffered no ill effects. A mountain bike also came past without mishap. Perhaps the rearward centre of gravity of the Brompton made it prone to the back end slipping out, or perhaps that the tyres have less grip than a mountain bike’s.”

Jenny

“My accident occurred when I was cycling to the Royal Mail parcel depot on 22 December 2009. I live in a part of the country where we get very low winter temperatures. The pavements and roads had quite a thick coating of ice which had started to melt producing a slushy conditions. I failed to recognise that these conditions are more hazardous than solidly frozen ice. When travelling down a minor road very slowly, barely above walking speed, I attempted to turn left and the bicycle skidded and slid out from underneath me, causing me to fall heavily on my left side. I can remember hitting the ground very hard, then lying in the road and telling myself I had to try and get up, before I either got run over or caught hypothermia. I think I may have lost consciousness for a short period – I don’t remember much else between this point in time and a complete stranger kindly driving me to the hospital. A fall of this type on ice results in a much higher impact with the ground than falling off a bicycle in normal conditions. The twisting action of the handlebars, combined with the impact with the ground, resulted in me breaking my left arm immediately below the shoulder joint. It was quite a surprise to me how serious an injury can be sustained by a fall from a bicycle at low speed: I was told that I may not make a full recovery and there was a possibility I would need an operation, although in the end I was lucky and made a full recovery

after 10 months of physiotherapy, without surgery.

I don’t regret my decision to cycle in bad weather conditions, because if I had walked to the bus stop instead I could just as easily have fallen over and injured myself. In some respects I would consider walking on ice more dangerous than cycling on it, as from experience I know the frequency of falling when walking on ice is greater than when cycling on it and if riding a bicycle I would at least be wearing a helmet. As I don’t have a car and I live in a part of the country where we have ice for extended periods, I can’t completely avoid walking and/or cycling in bad weather conditions. Obviously it isn’t feasible to stay indoors for weeks on end – it is necessary to travel work and to go out to buy food. For this reason, I haven’t stopped riding my bicycle in icy weather altogether but I would probably draw the line in a different place. Whereas before I would have gone out in any weather condition, I would now avoid very thick ice or ice that is starting to melt, especially if there is loose slush on top with hard packed ice underneath. I would also make sure I fit knobbly tyres to my bicycle before riding in icy conditions, as I believe that the smooth tyres I had fitted to the bike may have been a contributing factor. I would also plan my route to avoid minor roads and ironically cycle paths, as they generally have a thicker coating of ice than major roads and are unlikely to be gritted.”



Nick, London

“My ice accident occurred on Narrow Street London E14 in the morning about 8am on my way to work at Docklands. There was a sleeping policeman ramp that gathers a large puddle (dam like) which had solidly iced over. The car in front of me was obscuring the road so I didn’t see how large the ice area was. I saw the ice and thought I’ll get over that in a straight line but then I had to break as the car in front was breaking due to some snow ahead. I was therefore on the ice at the point of the sleeping policeman, so sloped and breaking, so no surprise the bike went out from under me and I landed on my right side as I was clipped in. I was not going fast so just a little cut and bruised. The car driver coming the other direction was a bit scared as at first it looked like I may slide in front of him, but both he and I stopped with plenty of space to spare. My bike was a little scratched but I got back on and continued to work.

My bike is an old steel touring road bike (1988 Bob Jackson!) with 28" tyres and I use rear panniers.”



John

“A February morning. A beautiful, crisp, clear and frosty morning, the first one after a depressingly wet winter. So I promised myself to take to the bridleways for my commute to work for the first time that year, rather than the boring main roads I revert to during poor weather. Full of the joys of Spring and anticipation of the delights to come I set off down the road; full of energy, half a mile later, I belted round the corner off the main road on to the first track; and becoming less full of the joys of Spring, I flew through the air for what seemed an awfully long time as the bicycle inevitably detached itself from the black ice that covered the corner, and rapidly realised when I tried to stand up that I had broken my left leg.

At work, we encourage the ‘tool box talk’; a quick assessment, just as you start the job, of what the obvious risks might be. And that was what I didn’t do. Bewitched by the cycling pleasures the crisp morning was going the bring, I failed to make the association with the hazards (black ice) that same weather would bring. I’ve cycled to work all through each subsequent winter, including in icy conditions, and actually including coming off again (when there is ice, it’s beyond my skill to stay upright on it). But the difference is, this time I had mentally noted the risk of ice before starting the journey, so when I came off, I was anticipating and going appropriately slowly, and no harm was done (other than to my nerves...).”

Andy, Croydon

“1. Boxing Day 1999, around 9.30am, riding on suburban road at perhaps 12mph, slightly uphill, seeking to stay on the crest of the (otherwise empty) road to avoid riding on the camber with its perceived greater chance of slipping my back wheel slipped and I landed on my back.

My back went into spasm and I rested for the remainder of the day, barely able to move – the effects took about a week to wear off, but no permanent damage was done.

2. February 2006 – on a rural road, near (but not in) woods, on a club run with four of us riding in two twos ... and it was one of the rear riders who lost a wheel on a patch of ice in a slight dip in the road after the front two had (just) ridden on the same patch – it was unclear why he (an experienced rider), riding effectively in the wheel-tracks of the rider in front, lost control. Again, there was no permanent damage.

In icy conditions, it is common for me (and my colleagues on the club run) to walk through bad stretches (or to re-route to avoid that road completely). Living as I do in Croydon, the roads (or, at least, a strip wide enough for me to ride in) are largely cleared by traffic/gritting except where snow has packed down into a half-inch-or-so layer which is fatal to ride on.

“... my wheels slid from under me and I ended up sprawled across the road.”

The greatest fear is losing a wheel when there is other traffic around which might not respond in time to a fallen cyclist ...”

Alan, Bristol

“I cycle to work every day from Emersons Green (Bristol) to Filton (Bristol). This is journey of about 7 miles. Early in the morning, during Winter in the dark I left home to cycle through the housing estate to join the local cycle path. There was no visible sign of snow, but about half a mile from home, cycling round a bend in the housing estate, my wheels slid from under me and I ended up sprawled across the road. Fortunately there were no cars immediately behind me as they would have found it difficult to stop and I could have been run over. I suffered minor grazes to my knee and took a severe knock to my chest. I picked myself up, sorted out my bicycle and carried on to work.

I think I slipped on black ice, because it was very difficult to see. The road was so slippery it was difficult to stand up and walk across the road surface. It is clear that councils do not grit minor roads or cycle paths, which contributes to the number of cycling accidents. Perhaps if they assessed the cost of a little extra grit against NHS costs, they would realise that it is cost effective to clear all roads and cycle routes.”



Life Cycle UK has been commissioned by NHS Bristol to run a campaign think twice* about cycling in icy weather. The campaign is based on a survey which shows that 1 in 4 non-collision incidents occur as a result of slips on ice. This document supports the campaign and includes various case studies supplied to us by respondents.

think twice* aims to get employers to not only introduce a cycling culture but also to help their cycling employees prepare for icy weather. think twice* encourages employers to adopt policies which enable this.

For more information

www.lifecycleuk.org.uk/think-twice-cycling-in-icy-weather

www.avon.nhs.uk/phnet/avonsafe/cycling%20injuries/nci%20summary%20report%20summer%202010.pdf

www.tinyurl.com/avonsafe

About Life Cycle UK

Life Cycle UK, registered charity 1077575, has a mission to promote cycling.

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