

12 reasons you might be crashing and what you can do about it

A guide for women who are new to mountain biking



A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Hi, I'm Claire.

I'm the person behind Dirt Maidens! I love helping women and girls find their place in the outdoors and mountain biking is my favourite way to do that.

We believe that women and girls deserve to feel safe, confident and inspired to mountain bike where they want to.

It is a privilege to support women develop connection to nature and build community that allows them to learn, grow and thrive. I hope these tips help you to keep progressing. Please let me know if there's anything I can help with!



Reason #1

You don't know how to mount and dismount correctly

Lots of people crash/fall down when trying to mount and dismount their bike or when starting and stopping. They get all tangled up and lose balance. Learning how to mount/dismount and start/stop is particularly important if you have a heavy e-bike, because the weight is something you may not be used to.

Tips for mounting safely:

- Stand on the side of the bike with both brakes on.
- Lean the bike sideways toward you.
- Swing your leg over the bike and lift the pedal up with your toes so the crank is at the 2 o'clock position.
- Your body should be between the seat and the handlebars.
- Put your foot onto the pedal.

Reason #2

You're too stiff

Many beginners are stiff, often because they're 'holding on for dear life!'. When you're really stiff, bumps in the terrain can throw your weight too much in one direction causing you to be thrown around and eventually, thrown off the bike.

Learning the correct body position, as well as learning 'bike body separation' is part of correcting this issue, and softening your arms and legs to let them absorb more of the bumps will lessen the forces of inertia, allowing for a smoother ride.



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Reason #3

Sudden, jerky or uneven braking

'An object in motion stays in motion'...

This notion of inertia is important to understand when braking, so that you can 'prepare' and brace yourself to stop or slow down when the bike stops or slows down, even if it happens suddenly. Smooth, gentle braking is a skill that takes practice, and it is best to start slowly on flat, even terrain, and once you can master braking at slower speeds, it is useful to increase speed and continue to aim for smooth braking. Then take it to the trails.

Reason #4

Braking too much through corners

Braking too hard through corners often causes a front wheel washout. When you brake, particularly with the front brake, the wheel wants to stop, and when it does, the momentum causes it to slide out to the side.

Tips:

Brake before the corner so you eliminate/reduce the need to brake through the corner

If you still need to brake through the corner, ease off the front brake.



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Reason #5

Too much speed for your skill level

With women who are new to mountain biking, this is not a common problem, but there are speed demons out there who this definitely applies to!

When you begin mountain biking, there are many skills that you can practice, but with experience, you also learn 'recovery' skills. These are skills that are hard to teach, but are a combination of body position, weighting and unweighting the bike, braking, trail scanning and more, and are usually a result of making lots of mistakes and being able to predict what might happen in a similar situation. Being able to 'save yourself' is a skill that comes from time on the trails, and when you're first starting out, if you're going too fast, you may not have time to adjust, recover and 'save yourself' from crashing.

Reason #6

Object fixation

'Look where you want to go'...

If you look at the tree, you'll probably crash into the tree.

Many new riders will notice the rocks, the obstacles, the ditches, the blackberry bushes- and head straight into them. It's important to try to look at the trail where you want to go. Put the blinders on, and really practice trail scanning on those trails where there are no/low consequences so that you really have this dialled.



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Reason #7

Your negative self-talk is killing your actual skills

Negative self-talk is super common. 'I can't' is a massive road block to progress. Understanding what is happening in your mind is half the battle.

Having a coach to watch, assess and progress your skills allows you to have an outsider's perspective on what you're able to do, and give you feedback on what is safe.

What are those mindset blocks that keep you feeling intimidated, incapable, fearful? This is a tricky one to work on, but once you find your inner cheerleader, your progress is inevitable!

Reason #8

You're missing fundamental skills

Some riders prefer to DIY their mountain biking experience, and crashing is part and parcel of this approach.

Many women who are new to mountain biking don't have the time to 'learn through experience', or the desire to make the mistakes that help them learn- especially if those mistakes include injuries, time off work, and bike repair costs!

It is much easier to not reinvent the wheel, but to invest in your skills by doing a skills clinic, and re-visiting the fundamentals regularly with an experienced coach who understands the unique challenges experienced by female riders.



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Reason #9

Not enough momentum

You may have heard the saying 'momentum is your friend', and in many cases, it is true! It is often more difficult to balance when moving slowly, and you may not be able to get more momentum because of rocks and the possibility of pedal strike. Many people will crash because they lose momentum and the bike then falls over, taking them with it!

Understanding momentum in both climbing and descending is useful, and watching other riders who are more advanced than you allows you to understand what speed you might need and how you can keep and/or maintain momentum when you really need it.

Learning how to bail (an extension of mounting/dismounting) in a variety of situations is important, and gives you confidence to try new things, knowing you'll be safe if you don't quite 'make it'.

Reason #10

Your weight isn't centred

Learning the correct body position on the bike is incredibly important. It is also not a one size fits all approach, because women are not all one size! There are many varying body shapes which may make your centre of gravity slightly different from the next woman. Long arms, short torso, larger breasts, larger bottom/thighs all affect where your centre of gravity is, and having an experienced coach watch you and fine tune your body position will allow you to stay centred and maintain ultimate control and traction.



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Reason #11

You're turning/steering too quickly

Any sudden change in direction is a recipe for disaster, and often this happens when people are cornering, particularly once they have gone through the apex of the corner and realise that they're not on the 'line' that they would like to be.

Cornering is complex manoeuvre, using lots of different skills at the same time.

Tips:

- Slow down
- Enter the corner wide (or 'high') and try to create a wider arc
- Try to hold your line all the way through the corner
- Practice on flat tarmac before practising on trails.
- Take a 'cornering' clinic!

Reason #12

Equipment issues

Having a bike that fits correctly and is set up for the terrain is so important for safety. If you buy a bike from a shop, they should fit you correctly, taking into consideration a number of measurements, as well as your trail riding preferences. Women come in all shapes and sizes, with varying requirements for comfort and safety.

Incorrect tyre pressure, having no standover height clearance, too hard or too soft suspension, and riding a bike 'unfit for purpose' (such as riding a hybrid bike on mountain bike trails), can all contribute to crashing. If you're not sure, ask at a bike shop (they might not know, depending on who you talk to!), or ask a coach or instructor.



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That's it!

Now, I've just delivered a lot of information and maybe one or more of these has resonated with you.

Crashes are not fun. Apart from the pain, the injuries, the medical costs and time off work, they can also damage your bike and equipment, which is another unnecessary expense. Crashes can also have a big impact on your confidence and play a big part in your mindset when returning to riding.

From here, work out what skills you might need to focus on. Work out if it might be a good idea to book into a foundational skills clinic, a Rock n Roll Clinic or a Carve clinic. Or get in touch if you have any questions, or if you're interested in working 1:1 with me.

If you have a crash, try to analyse what happened, and find a way to get back out there and work on the things you need to reduce or eliminate further crashes.

Happy trails!
Claire x



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