

Fit Facts™

FROM THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EXERCISE®

SMOOTH SKATING

The in-line skating industry has come a long way since 1984 when there were only 20,000 skaters in the U.S. Today that number has grown to more than 26 million. The reasons for its popularity are simple. In-line skating is fun, low-impact and easy to learn. It's the perfect way to introduce exercise and an ideal activity for any fitness level.

In fact, recent fitness studies indicate that skating has a significant impact on fitness levels, especially in the areas of cardiovascular development, lung capacity, muscular strength and weight loss. One hour on skates consumes almost as many calories as running, and it strengthens the muscles and connective tissues surrounding the ankles, knees and hips.

GETTING STARTED

Safety is your priority. When you feel safe, you're open to new experiences and you decrease your risk of injury. The number-one reported reason for in-line-related trips to the emergency room, other than for cuts and bruises, is injury to the arms, wrists and hands that occurs when no protective gear is worn.

If you don't own a pair of skates and protective gear, locate the nearest in-line rental shop, where you can rent a pair for about \$5 to \$20. Here are some more tips to help you get started:

- When renting or buying, be sure your skates fit snugly; your feet should not have a lot of room to move around. If you feel an uncomfortable pressure point anywhere around your feet or ankles, adjust the tongue of the skate. If this doesn't help, try on another pair.

- Any good rental shop will include all protective gear — wrist guards, knee and elbow pads, helmet — with your rental. A bike helmet works fine, too.
- If possible, stand up and take a basic stride forward, on carpet or in the rental shop. Get a feel for the support surrounding your ankles. Do small tasks to get used to the skates — shift weight from one foot to the other, step around in a small circle, and move your ankles and knees from side to side to feel the wheels' edges.

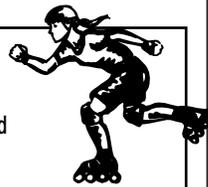
Braking Basics

The heel brake is usually situated on the right heel of the skate.

Step One: Roll slowly forward on both feet, your posture upright with arms in front and knees and ankles relaxed.

Step Two: Stagger (scissor) your right foot forward several inches while maintaining your posture.

Step Three: Still scissoring your feet, lift the right toe up to feel the brake engage. Keep your knees and ankles flexed and relaxed. It takes a few feet to stop completely and several tries to become proficient.



- Find an outdoor location with a flat, relatively smooth surface, free from traffic or obstacles. Possible options include a parking lot, school yard or tennis court, preferably with a grassy area nearby.
- Learn how to stop! There are a variety of braking systems currently available, depending on the manufacturer. The box above offers basic instruction that works well with all of these systems.

- Improve your stride, and try to get some type of rhythm going. With each stride, concentrate on the feel of your hips balancing over one foot, then over the other. The better your balance, the longer you'll be able to glide on that foot. Next, assume a slightly more flexed athletic position to improve your "stroke" or pushing phase of striding. Concentrate on pushing off from the inside of the whole foot (not just off the toes). Once you've pushed off, return (regroup) that foot back under your hips; push off with the other foot.
- Turning can strike fear into the hearts of novice skaters, but the following progression makes it seem simple. First, look in the desired direction, and then point your big toes in that direction. Keep ankles and knees flexed and relaxed; arms in front for balance. Continue your turn in the shape of a "C" until you roll to a stop. The distance between your feet will vary; some might stand wider than others. Try the same thing in the other direction; then try linking turns together.

Once you master the basics, it's realistic to redefine your potential to advance your limits of safe effort and your fitness level.

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