

Eight Week Training Plan to Ride a Century

The 100-mile Goal

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A 100-mile ride is a milestone nearly every cyclist strives to reach. The roadblock for most of us is finding the time to prepare. With only so many hours in the day, most of which we spend working and sleeping, ride time is limited. This eight-week plan will have any determined cyclist ready to hit 100 with just three rides per week: one long, one steady and one speedy. On rest days, remember to do something to keep your body moving.

LONG RIDE: THE MEAT In your first week, you'll want to ride 1.5 to 2 hours, or about 20 miles, and build from there. (If you're already comfortable with a longer ride than Week 1 prescribes, start with 2.5 to 3 hours and follow the same guidelines for mileage building, topping off at about 85 miles.) Do your long rides at a steady, but not taxing, pace--about 70 to 75 percent of your maximum heart rate. Though most cyclists find that Saturdays or Sundays work best for their long rides, it doesn't matter which day you choose as long as you get it done.

STEADY RIDE: THE BREAD AND BUTTER During these rides, aim for two to four longer efforts (15 to 30 minutes in length; 15 minutes easy pedaling in between) that increase your breathing and elevate your heart rate to around 80 to 85 percent of your MHR. Ride at threshold, as if you're pedaling with someone slightly faster than you. These rides will simulate your goal for your century and train your body to ride more briskly while maintaining comfort, so you can finish 100 miles faster and fresher.

SPEED RIDE: THE SECRET SAUCE Distance riders often skip speed work because they think they need volume, not intensity, to go long. But riding fast improves your endurance by raising your lactate threshold, the point at which your muscles scream "Slow down!" When you raise this ceiling, you can ride faster and farther before your body hits the brakes. Aim to do four to six very hard or max efforts ranging from 30 seconds to two minutes; in between, spin easy for twice the length of the interval. Do these on a challenging stretch of road, such as a hill or into a headwind.

Make Every Mile Count

Finishing a century means making the best choices for all 100 of those miles.

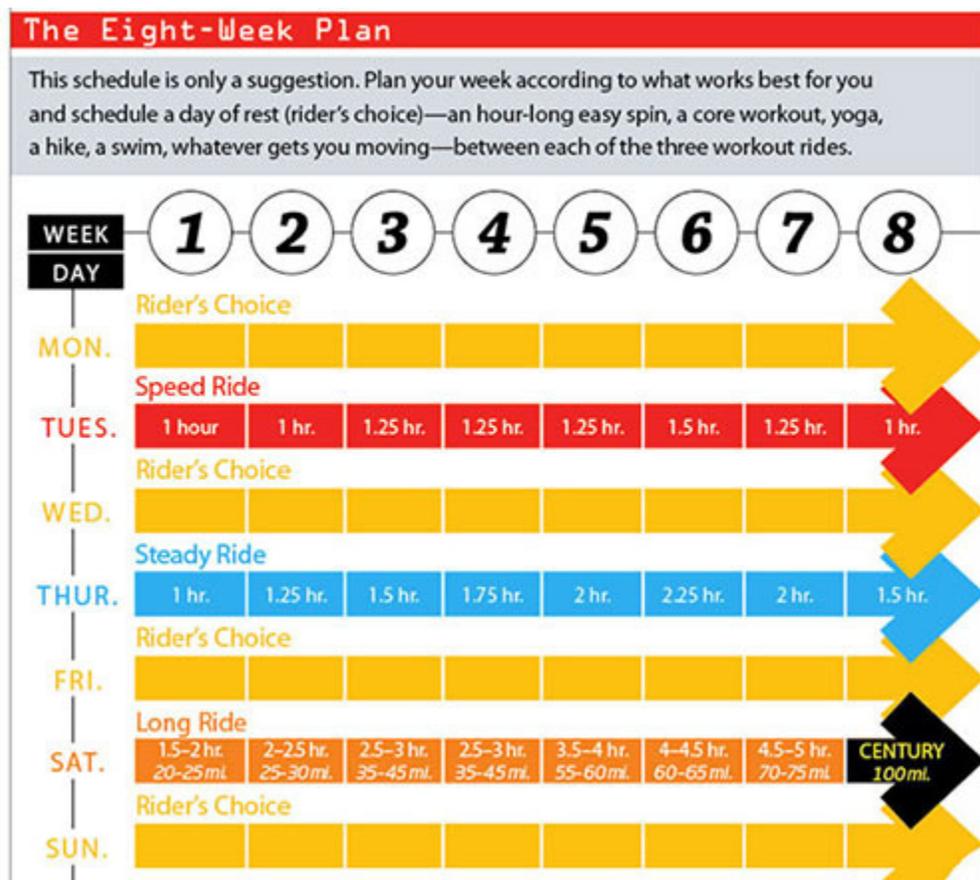
SPACE OUT Stuffing yourself full of calories prior to the ride will divert blood to your stomach, which weakens your legs and slows you down. Instead, eat a carbohydrate-rich breakfast of 400 to 500 calories two to three hours before the event. Then aim to eat and drink 200 to 300 calories every hour thereafter.

KEEP A STEADY FLOW Consume at least one bottle's worth of energy drink per hour (more if it's hot) to provide electrolytes and a few carbohydrates. Choose a flavor that will entice you to sip often.

PEDAL YOUR PACE The biggest newbie mistake is letting yourself be seduced into speeding along with faster riders early in the day, only to crack 60 miles in. Fall in with riders who pedal your pace and avoid going into the red (feeling breathless) for the first 50 miles. You'll finish fresh and strong.

MOVE AROUND Avoid aches and pains in your neck and back by changing your hand position often and standing out of the saddle to stretch periodically.

KEEP IT SHORT Take advantage of rest stops to use the bathroom, refill bottles, stretch and grab some food. But don't linger. A stop that lasts more than 10 to 15 minutes will cause your legs to stiffen up and make it harder to get going again.



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