

The Quick Check:

First, pick your bike up a few inches and drop it. Hear any rattles or odd noises? Check them out. You never know what could have worked loose since the last time you went for a ride. Look for any loose nuts, bolts and screws and tighten them up. Many adjustments and repairs should be done by a bicycle mechanic.

Push the tires against a curb. If you can flatten them, you need more air. Inflate to the pressure shown on the tire's sidewall.

Got coaster brakes? If so, make sure there's not too much slack in the chain. But make sure it's not too tight. Also, check that the clamp on the right side of the wheel is attached.

Make sure the tire valve stems point straight to the hubs to avoid rim cuts. Such cuts can't be patched.

Rock the wheels from side to side. If they move, the hub bearings are loose and need to be tightened. Next, spin the wheels. They should roll smoothly. If they don't, the hub bearings are too tight.

Look closely at the chain. It shouldn't be either caked with grease and dirt or dry and rusty. Next, have a friend hold the bike up by the saddle so you can turn the pedals and watch the chain. Does it skip anywhere? If so, it's probably got a tight link.

Twist and rock the saddle. It shouldn't move in any direction. Tighten it at the binder bolt and at the saddle clamp.

Twist and rock the handlebars. They shouldn't be loose. If the stem is loose in the frame, tighten the binder bolt at the top. If the handlebars are loose in the stem, tighten the bolt in front.

Rock the fork and handlebars forward and back and turn from side to side to check for a loose or tight headset (the bearings where handlebars and fork enter the frame). They shouldn't rock or bind.

Got hand brakes? Squeeze them. The levers should work smoothly and not hit the handlebars; the brake pads should hit the rims squarely.

Squeeze pairs of spokes together. They should be tight and the wheels should be straight. Also look for broken spokes. Truing wheels is a bit tricky. You can do a lot of damage with a spoke wrench.

Also keep each wheel's axle nut or quick release lever tight so the wheel won't come off while you ride.

Rock the pedals front to back. They shouldn't move and should spin freely. If they're loose or tight, that means adjusting the bearings.

Rock the crank arms from side to side. There should be NO play at all. If there is, that means the bearings inside the bottom bracket shell are loose and should be tightened.

