



When Should You Really Replace a Motorcycle Helmet?

Separating Fact from Fiction

A motorcycle helmet should be a critical part of your riding gear. It protects your noggin, can make you visible to other drivers/riders and saves you from dust, heat, wind, rain and even insects. It should be vital to your rides and when it comes to changing your helmet, remember it is not a forever thing. Your motorcycle helmet has a life of its own.

The Snell Memorial Foundation recommends replacing helmets within 5 years of first use or 7 years from the manufacturing date. They make a seemingly convincing argument but don't actually offer any research; it's a "judgement call" and not research based.

Many manufactures and dealers recommend every 5 years, others say replace every 5-7 years, even if you haven't used it. But there's no solid evidence to back this up. With the variety of materials, brands, and environmental factors involved, it is not possible to make an accurate generalized statement like this.

So when we ask, "When should I change my motorcycle helmet?" the answer can be summed up after considering the following points.

Key Factors That Impact Your Motorcycle Helmets Lifespan

Deterioration: Over time, the materials used in helmet construction, including the shell, glues, and EPS (expanded polystyrene) liner, can break down due to exposure to elements, sweat, UV rays, and general wear and tear. If you are among the daily riders who use their helmet regularly, then the chances of your helmet showing signs of deterioration earlier is higher than the occasional weekend rider and therefore, your helmet would need to be replaced sooner. Your motorcycle helmet needs to be replaced when there are visible signs of cracks, broken straps, and deep scratches. These signs indicate that the integrity of your helmet has been compromised and thus it's time to buy a new one. Loosening of padding is another sign of deterioration, but padding itself can be changed which can help get the snug fit back for your helmet.

Exposure to Elements: Extreme temperatures of hot and cold can weaken the helmet's sturdy outer shell, and even its EPS (expanded polystyrene) liner, which is designed to absorb shock during an impact. Frequent exposure to sunlight, wind, and rain accelerates the degradation process. Additionally, harsh chemicals like cleaning products not specifically designed for helmets can damage the materials and adhesives.

If for any reason your motorcycle helmet has been exposed to direct heat or fire, it definitely is time for a change.

Proper storage in a cool, dry place away from direct sunlight is essential to maximize your helmet's lifespan.

Accidents and Drops: Be mindful even a minor accident or drop can compromise the structural integrity of your helmet, which increases the frequency of how often to replace your motorcycle helmet. Internal cracks or damage to the liner may not be readily visible, but they can significantly reduce the helmet's protective capabilities. If your helmet has been involved in any sort of accident or drop, it's crucial to replace it immediately.

If you have been in an accident where your helmet has faced impact, even if there are no visible signs of damage, it is highly possible that the integrity of the motorcycle helmet has been compromised and thus it is recommended to remove the internal padding and check the EPS (expanded polystyrene) lining of the helmet thoroughly for any such signs of damage or cracks. Similar is the case when you drop your helmet from a height. The sudden impact caused due to an accident or dropping of the helmet can cause damage to the helmet shell which makes your head vulnerable in any future incidents.

Change of Riding Style: (Touring, Sport, Off Road riding) This might sound awkward but it's true; your change of riding style does require a change of helmet. Think about will a touring helmet work for your adventure (off-road) rides too? Adventure riding or off road riding is done in an altogether different terrain and thus such helmets need to have more breathing space and wider visibility for the rider. The helmets are designed as per the riding conditions so if you plan to change your choice of motorcycle and riding style, the same motorcycle helmet that you've been using might not be useful anymore.

Understanding the Standards:

Motorcycle helmet standards like DOT, SNELL, and ECE 22.06 ensure helmets provide adequate protection during impacts by setting minimum requirements for impact absorption, penetration resistance, and retention strength. These standards help riders choose helmets that meet specific safety criteria for different riding environments and activities.

DOT:

While the DOT standard is the baseline, some helmets may have a DOT rating but not meet the same standards as helmets certified by Snell or ECE 22.06.

SNELL:

SNELL-certified helmets are generally considered to offer higher levels of protection compared to DOT-certified helmets due to their stricter testing requirements.

ECE: (Economic Commission for Europe)

This standard is recognized worldwide and is often considered a higher standard of safety than DOT.

While DOT and SNELL are most common in the US, other standards like FIM (for racing) and SHARP (which tests and evaluates helmets from an independent organization) exist and may be relevant in specific contexts.

Five years might be the ideal time to upgrade your helmet as it accounts for the natural breakdown of materials like glues, resins, and the EPS foam used in the helmet's construction. These materials degrade over time, potentially compromising the helmet's ability to absorb impact energy effectively.

The more frequently you use your helmet, the faster it'll wear out. Regular daily riders are subject to their helmets showing signs of wear and tear, like cracks, broken straps, and scratches. In cases like this, a helmet is likely to need replacing sooner than one used for occasional weekend rides.

Ultimately, the question of how long does a motorcycle helmet last doesn't have a one-size-fits-all answer. By considering the manufacturer's recommendations, your riding frequency and riding conditions such as touring or off road, and the condition of your helmet, you can make an informed decision about how often to replace your motorcycle helmet.

Taking proper care and storage of your helmet will extend its life, however, considering the generic standard life span of 5-7 years is not a bad idea when it comes to replacing a helmet. When in doubt, invest in a new helmet sooner than later.

Never Gamble with Your Safety!