

Preventing Indoor Cycling Injuries

Although indoor cycling is a nonimpact activity, riders are not immune to injury. Cycling and biomechanics experts offer these suggestions to ensure that your biking workouts stay trouble free:

- 1. Take Injury Prevention Seriously.** Some studies show that as many as 50 to 70 percent of bicyclists report neck and back pain. Cyclists who train extensively or ride with poor posture often experience hand numbness. And knee pain is common because the patellofemoral joint endures significant compressive force during bicycling.
- 2. Understand the Importance of Proper Bike Fit.** Proper bike adjustment reduces the incidence and magnitude of pain and muscular tension. If you're not sure how to adjust something on your bike, ask your instructor to help you.
- 3. Examine Your Pedals and Cleats.** Pedals that "fix" the feet can be a potential hazard, but floating, clipless pedals are not available on all bikes. If you wear cleats, you should explore different pedal systems and use the one that works best for you. Cleats that aren't set up right can throw off tracking in the ankles, knees and hips. When pedal straps are too tight, you can expect your feet to turn numb.
- 4. Make Sure Your Saddle Isn't Too Low.** Anterior knee pain (pain in the front part of the knee) is usually a by-product of riding on a saddle set too low. By forcing greater knee flexion, this saddle position creates stress on the back of the patella. (One tip: Don't set the seat too low in an effort to reduce saddle soreness. Use gel seats and padded shorts instead. And hang in there: The numbness and discomfort you feel as a beginner will pass.)
- 5. Make Sure Your Saddle Isn't Too High.** A saddle set too high can increase saddle soreness and make for an uncomfortable ride. Overextending your legs with each pedal stroke can result in Achilles tendinitis, hamstring problems and posterior knee pain (pain in the back of the knee). Edmund Burke, PhD, director of exercise science at the University of Colorado in Colorado Springs and a Spinning® health and fitness advisory board member, adds that excessive reaching can also lead to low-back and hip problems. A fixed cleat, coupled with an inappropriately high saddle, magnifies stress on the knee.
- 6. Check That Your Saddle Isn't Too Far Forward.** The front-to-back seat setting determines your knee position over the pedals. Michele Scharff-Olson, PhD, associate professor of exercise science at Auburn University in Montgomery, Alabama, and a Cycle Reebok® instructor, says, "A seat that is too far [forward] malaligns the pelvis, is stressful to the low back and is very uncomfortable in the crotch and buttocks."
- 7. Check That Your Saddle Isn't Too Far Back.** When this happens, your legs must reach excessively in order to pedal, and—as when your seat is too high—you risk incurring problems like pulled hamstrings, low-back pain and Achilles tendinitis.
- 8. Ensure That Your Handlebars Aren't Too Low.** "If the handlebars are too low, [you may place] too much weight on the hands, arms and shoulders," says Burke. This can cause tingling and numbness in the hands, aggravate carpal tunnel syndrome and lead to shoulder pain. Making sure your handlebars are high enough is especially important if you are a beginning cyclist, have a history of discomfort in the neck or back or have weak or inflexible torso muscles.
- 9. Ensure That Your Handlebars Aren't Too High.** On the flip side, Scharff-Olson warns that extremely high handlebars can impair your cycling technique. "If you are sitting too straight, there is a greater tendency to push down on the pedals instead of making perfect circles."
- 10. Wear Proper Footwear.** Wearing soft-soled, noncycling shoes can cause arch discomfort and plantar fasciitis. Choosing the right shoes often remedies problems like numbness and tingling, which can indicate that shoes are too narrow.

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