



Orthopaedic Associates
of Portland, P.A.



If the Bike Fits, Ride It!

By Scott Marr, M.D.

Longer days and warmer temperatures mean that the early cycling season is underway once again. Local cycling clubs have already begun a schedule of weekend group rides, and lycra-clad cyclists can be seen in ever increasing numbers as we enter the spring months. Other than maneuvering around potholes, avoiding sand and occasional icy patches, early spring is a great time to get out on the road. Cooler temperatures prevent overheating; there are fewer cars on the road; and visibility is highest without leaves on the trees and bushes.

Unfortunately, there are some early season mistakes that many cyclists, both recreational and the more serious athlete, fall victim to each year. Often, the excitement of getting back on the road clouds the judgment of novice and expert alike. Many, especially those riding in groups, go out too hard during the early season without an appropriate aerobic base. Others endure neck, shoulder and knee pains on the bike that

can and should be avoided.

Job one for a cyclist is to begin using your muscles in a certain way again.

There are very few activities that mimic the focused, repetitive motion of cycling. Spinning at low resistance

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on a stationary bike is a great way to slowly reintroduce your muscles to the action of pedaling while increasing both flexibility and strength. Then, before hammering down the road in fast-paced group rides that leave you gasping for breath with lactic acid pouring through your veins, it is important to do longer, slower rides over the first 4 to 8 weeks of riding to build your aerobic capacity. A strong aerobic base is the foundation

for faster-paced riding down the road.

Cyclists also need to make sure that the neck, shoulders and arms are conditioned to withstand long intervals in the same position. Bike riders are encouraged to avoid locking elbows, extending the neck by riding for long periods of time in the handle bar drops, and changing positions frequently to avoid gradual, but painful injuries.

A post-ride stretching regimen emphasizing the hip flexors, quadriceps and hamstrings will help keep your body flexible. Proper on-the-bike hydration and allowing enough recovery time between rides are also critical in helping mitigate bike-related musculoskeletal injuries. And like many athletic activities, a strong core is critical to generating pedal power and avoiding lower back pain.

Once you've prepared your body, it's time to look at your bike. Cardio and muscle strength aside, riding a bike should not be painful. If you are having discomfort in your knee, back, shoulders, neck or anywhere else, it's

probably a good idea to have someone look at you and your bike and make sure the two of you are a good fit.

Whether you're riding a brand new bike or you have just made some minor adjustments to your ride over the winter, it's important that the frame, seat position and pedals all match your individual body mechanics. Because of the repetitive nature of the sport, it's easy for a minor discomfort to escalate into something more serious.

While any good bike shop will help you find a bike that fits your riding style,

budget and body size, there are also specialists in Southern Maine that make additional adjustments (for a price) that can help you maximize your cycling efficiency and overall comfort. The more miles you plan to put on your bike this season, the more these specialized services may make sense to you.

By taking precise, often laser guided measurements and calculating ideal bike-to-body ratios, these experts can almost guarantee that you'll get more out of your riding experience.

Just remember, riding a bike should be

fun. Don't let a poor-fitting bike, lack of core strength, improper stretching and poor aerobic conditioning come between you and the open road. Before you know it, it will be winter once again. ■

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