

Cycling and back pain

Today, with growing concerns about the environment and increasing difficulties in commuting, many of us are opting to get on a bike rather than drive or brave public transport. Whether you choose to ride to and from work or you are employed in a job that requires you to ride, as bike courier for example, cycling is both an excellent way to keep fit and get around. However, estimates suggest that anywhere between 30-70% of us will get back pain when cycling. This pain can be caused by a variety of reasons but the good news is there are simple things you can do to ensure that you do not develop back pain or you manage your back pain and prevent it from becoming long term and debilitating.

What causes back pain when riding?

Back pain when riding may be caused by;

- ◆ Prolonged riding/sitting
- ◆ The wrong type of bike
- ◆ The wrong sized bike
- ◆ Improperly positioned saddles
- ◆ Improperly positioned handlebars
- ◆ Weak back muscles
- ◆ Weak stomach/core muscles
- ◆ Bad riding posture
- ◆ Riding on rough terrain



Top tips

- ◆ Make sure that you **stop and take breaks** when riding long distances for a long period of time.
- ◆ During your breaks **stretch and move** around to loosen stiff muscles.
- ◆ Make sure that your bike is the correct bike for you. See an expert if necessary to ensure that your bike is the right **height, size and type** to suit you and your riding needs, style or preference.
- ◆ **Position** the handle bar, saddle etc of your bike correctly for your comfort.
- ◆ Stand up every so often when riding to ensure you're **moving** and your back is not in the same position throughout.
- ◆ **Do exercises** that strengthen your back and core muscles such as sit ups.
- ◆ Maintain good cycling **posture** - don't hunch over too far or sit up too straight.
- ◆ Ensure you or your bike is **not overloaded** - particularly important if you are a bike courier/messenger.
- ◆ Consider your **route** - try to avoid areas with rough terrain especially if you have the wrong type of bike not designed for that environment.
- ◆ If your job involves riding **talk to your employer** or someone in the HR department about your back pain as they may be able to help find ways to resolve the problem eg., get you a new bike.

Useful exercises

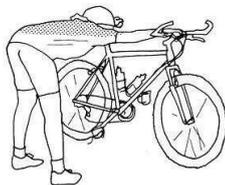
Cycling helps to keep us fit which is the best way to try to prevent or manage back pain. Here are some simple exercises you can try to help keep you on your bike

Before riding

Arms, shoulder and back stretch

- Place your hands on your bikes saddle and handle bar
- Step back a few steps
- Bend your back until it is at a right angle to the ground

Hold the stretch for 15 seconds



Upper back and shoulder stretch

- Clasp your hands together behind your back
- Slowly raise your arms behind you until you feel a stretch
- Hold for 10 seconds then lower arms

Repeat 4 times

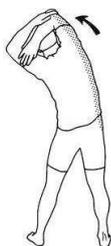


When taking a break

Side stretch

- Stand with your feet slightly apart
- Grab your left elbow with your right hand and your right elbow with your left hand above your head
- Slowly pull your left elbow to the right with your right hand until you feel a stretch. Hold for 5 seconds
- Return to upright position and do the same on the left

Repeat 4 times (each side).



Toe touch

- Bend forward at your lower back to touch your toes
- Try to keep your knees straight but if this is difficult you may bend them
- Hold for 20 seconds then return to original position



After a ride

Lower back stretch

- Place your palms on your lower back fingers facing downwards
- Slowly arch your back and stick out your chest while slightly leaning backwards. Hold for 15 seconds then return to original position

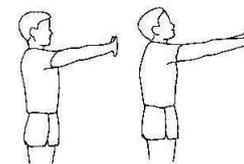
Repeat 3 times



Upper back stretch

- Clasp your hands together, palms facing forward. Extend your arms in front of your body and hold this position for 10 seconds then relax

Repeat three times



At home

Diagonal stretch

- Point the toes of your left foot as you extend your right arm
- Stretch as far as is comfortable
- Hold 5 seconds, and then relax
- Stretch the right leg and left arm the same way

Repeat four times (on each side)



Seated back and hip stretch

- Sit with your left hand behind you and your left leg bent and crossed over resting outside your right knee
- Place right elbow outside your left thigh
- Slowly turn to look over your left shoulder while rotating your upper body as far as you can for the stretch
- Hold for 10 seconds. Release, and then do the same for the other side

Repeat 4 times (each side)

