

Don't be a pain in the butt: Avoiding saddle sores

The most common comment I hear from people who do begin riding is not that their legs hurt but that their seat/bottom/derriere/buttocks hurts. One of the most important reasons for training is to make sure your seat is prepared for hours in your bike saddle. When you train, you obviously are training your legs to go around several thousands times per hour, but you are also training your butt to sit on the small, narrow, hard saddle for several hours at a time as well. Several things can happen when your seat is not trained properly. You may notice soreness under your sit bones after a long ride. This usually goes away fairly quickly. The next thing that may happen is chaffing where your seat and legs rub from pedaling. The worst thing that can happen is development of saddle sores. These can keep you off your bike for several days. Here are some suggestions for avoid being a pain in the rear.

First, you should wear cycling shorts. These are designed to provide padding to your tender nether region. The padding also helps absorb perspiration to avoid chaffing and development of saddle sores. TIP: DO NOT WEAR UNDERWEAR UNDER YOUR CYCLING SHORTS. Cycling shorts are designed to be worn directly against the skin. Underwear adds another layer of clothing that can rub and chafe, and even worse, has seams which can irritate your skin. If you don't like wearing tight fitting Lycra shorts, there are different types of riding shorts, including baggy shorts. But they all have an inner lining with a chamois (pronounced 'shammy'). In the olden days, shorts came with real leather chamois, but modern shorts have synthetic ones which provide more padding and are easier to clean and maintain. But they are still called chamois.

Second, ride a lot. Spend a lot of time sitting on your bike saddle. As mentioned above, this isn't just about training your legs, it's training your seat. In many cases, it's more about training your seat. Gradually build up to longer rides. Doing a lot of riding all at once can irritate your tender seat skin. By gradually building up to longer miles, you will gradually toughen your skin. This is a great reason for riding year round by the way. You maintain your toughened seat skin and don't have to retrain it each spring.

Third, to avoid chaffing, there are commercial products available that you can use to apply to your skin where it contacts the chamois of your shorts. There are several brands with rather interesting names such as Chamois Butt'r, Assos Chamois Cream, DZNUTS, Friction Freedom, and Ride EZ Chamois Cream. Wipe a thin layer on your skin in your groin area prior to your ride to help provide a smoother ride.

Fourth, keep your groin area as clean and dry as possible to avoid the dreaded saddle sore. Saddle sores are infections in your skin around your seat area. These are caused by bacteria getting into your skin and not being cleaned promptly or thoroughly. These become infected and are usually right under your sit bones where you put pressure on your saddle. These are extremely uncomfortable and can make it impossible to ride. Saddle sores are so painful they can cause a Tour de France rider to quit the race. Prevention is definitely the best defense. Make sure you wear clean shorts after every ride. Do not wear dirty shorts a second day. Just hand wash in a sink, wring and hang out to dry inside out in the sun if possible. Use a bit of laundry detergent, or if you are traveling and don't have any, you can use some shampoo. TIP: make sure you rinse thoroughly. If it rains and you haven't rinsed well, your shorts will start foaming. You also need to clean your own skin thoroughly and quickly after each ride. The worst thing you can do is spend the rest of the day in your dirty, wet shorts after you finish your ride. Shower and change as quickly as possible after you finish riding. Bacteria love warmth and moisture, exactly the conditions in your shorts after a ride. When you take a shower be sure to thoroughly clean your groin area. If you can't shower right away here's another great tip that I use. Bring some individually wrapped wipes and wipe your groin area clean when changing into street clothes. I use Preparation H Portable Wipes that come in individual packets. You can find these at your local drug store. If you don't have these wipes, you can also use hand sanitizer such as Purell. I suggest you keep a small bottle of it with your bike gear at all times.

Ride on with a comfy bottom – Coach David Ertl

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