

Australian Physiotherapy Association's top ten tips for cycling in comfort



(Adapted from [APA's 'Top ten tips for cycling in comfort' media release, 12 October, 2015](#))

As enthusiasm for cycling continues to grow in Australia and with summer fast approaching, it is important for cyclists to understand the techniques for warm-up and recovery to help enjoy their ride in comfort.

Cyclists are at a higher risk of sustaining knee, lower back, neck and shoulder injuries if they don't take the right steps to minimise this risk.

Melbourne-based Specialist Sports Physiotherapist, [Paul Visentini](#), provides his ten top tips to help avoid injuries and recover more effectively after a long cycle.

1. Make sure the bike fits you; have a 'Bike Fitting Assessment' – Each person has a “window of function” regarding the shape and size of the bike, meaning there are no exact measurements. Some riders will need to change their set-up during a season as they get fitter and stronger. It is important that your bike fits within your “window of function” at any moment in your riding life to prevent pain and discomfort.

2. Make sure your body fits the bike – If you fit the bike, and are well conditioned, training will cause less overload & pain, and recovery will be quicker. Effective strengthening & training strategies developed by a physiotherapist can vastly improve your cycling performance.

3. Have a great pedalling technique – Good pedalling not only allows you to go faster for longer, but also shares the load while pedalling, preventing specific overload of any one joint or area of tissue and minimising discomfort.

4. Vary your riding – you don't need to 'smash' yourself every day! There is a tendency for many cyclists to compete and ride hard all the time. The pros don't ride hard every day in training, nor should you. The day after a long, hard riding session should be easy, with high cadence / low resistance pedalling. Even at the end of a hard ride you should have 15-30 minutes of easy pedalling to recover your legs and flush out the lactic acid build-up.

5. Stretch and activate; Build into your effort – If you are suffering from stiffness or soreness, your technique may suffer. Also, cold muscle is more likely to be injured. The best warm-up is to allow your blood to circulate, warming the tissues. Build easy into your cycle by pedalling easy to begin with.

6. Target sleep, stress, diet and alcohol – General health can really affect your comfort levels and ability to recover. A lack of sleep increases the risk of stress fractures by 300%; stress makes you more likely to be injured, and slows recovery from injury.

7. Eat well during and after a ride of 2 hours or more – Our bodies can handle one hour without food, but from the second hour onwards it requires 50-100mg of carbohydrate per hour. Protein-rich foods after a ride can aid recovery.

8. Have a strong and consistent recovery routine – Muscles can become sore due to inflammation and tightening of the fibres, with lactic acid build up a bi-product of exercise. Gentle stretching and self-massage helps to remedy this, a spikey ball and foam roller are great recovery aids. Using cold or hot-cold therapy, like walking in the sea or hot-cold showers, is said to stimulate the neurovascular system and accelerated recovery.

9. The recovery ride – As previously mentioned, an easy one hour ride at high cadence and low power is highly recommended to enable good recovery after a hard day.

10. Massage – Massage is used as a recovery tool especially in the professional ranks. Riders find a 30 minute massage in the evening essential to fronting up well the following day. Relaxation and release of tight muscles and tendons, and the reduction of lactic acid build-up give great relief to riders of all levels. Another benefit of massage for the rider is psychological, giving enforced relaxation after a tough day helps get a good sleep.

Riding injured is uncomfortable and will adversely affect your performance.

Physiotherapists can help advise you on the most effective recovery techniques and fit you to your bike to avoid injuries.

With compliments of Craig Wisdom:

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