

Secret Women's Business

[or how to take care of your nether regions on the bike]

My credentials - I am a rural GP and a keen bike rider, veteran of 2 one-week rides [Qld & KI] and 2 two-week rides along the Mawson Trail, as well as once Around the Bay in a Day and 3 Tour Down Under Challenge rides.

This advice is particularly aimed at longer rides on tour when you will be spending many days consecutively in the saddle. While much of the advice will be equally as pertinent to male cyclists, this article is aimed more specifically at the female of the species.

What you are trying to avoid... problems range from mild soreness to chafing to saddle sores which can be minor (or sometimes more significant) skin infection or ulcers.

What causes it? ... prolonged uninterrupted pressure of bum on seat cuts off blood supply. Combined with friction, heat & moisture, this makes it easy for bacteria living on the skin to invade hair follicles & sweat glands. It can also cause tissue damage of the oxygen starved skin [ischaemia].

How to avoid it...

1. Choose your saddle carefully, and try a few different ones if they seem to be causing troubles. Softer saddles are not necessarily better, but some gel seats may provide greater distribution of pressure on the sit bones.
2. Bike set-up - if you are having recurring troubles, play around with your position on the bike. Sometimes even a minor adjustment to seat height and angle can make the world of difference. Get some assistance from your bike shop if you need.
3. Toughen your butt by gradually increasing ride times prior to a multi-day ride.
4. Wear good knicks and DO NOT WEAR UNDERWEAR under your knicks. Like seats- you may need to try a few different brands to find the pair that suits your butt best.
5. Get out of your damp ride gear as soon as possible after a ride.
6. Wear fresh knicks every day.
7. A layer of ointment between butt & chamois provides protection against some of the effects of friction. Most cyclists will advise you of their preferred choice - I would suggest trying different kinds until you are happy with the result. Plain petroleum jelly; nappy rash creams; papaw ointment or specific chamois cream or butt butter are all worth a try.
8. Get your bum off the bike seat at every possible chance- stand on level pedals or pedal standing every 10-15 minutes to allow a good return of blood flow. A downhill run is a good opportunity for this.
9. Reposition your anatomy and/or your knicks as soon as you detect any sign of irritation. A fold of skin or material or the pressure from a seam can easily start rubbing and result in a significant problem.
10. Use tampons not pads, or skip your period if you are on the pill.
11. Carry moistened toilet tissue for emergency calls of nature.

How to treat your butt if you are having trouble ...

1. Stop riding for a while until things settle by themselves.
2. Keep the area as clean and dry as possible.
3. Use nappy rash creams or Savlon [try different types until you find one that seems to suit you best. Calendula based creams can be useful too.]
4. More serious infections may require antibiotic tablets to settle.

Don't forget that prevention is always better than cure!
Happy cycling!

Dr Alison Edwards