

## ASK THE BIKE FITTER

**M.W. of Riverside asks “My bike felt too long, I felt too stretched out so I moved the seat forward to get closer to the handlebars. Now my back and knees hurt. Why?”**

Saddle positioning has everything to do with (a) placing your knees directly over the pedal spindles (saddle fore/aft), and (b) dialing in the correct knee angle so you are not over-extending or hyper flexing your knees (saddle up/down) and nothing to do with compensating for being stretched out. If you are feeling you are too stretched out, it should be addressed by putting on a shorter stem - a good bike fitter can help you with that.

But, don't end up going too short. For example, if, on your road bike, you need a stem shorter than 70mm, steering and handling will become compromised and a smaller frame should be considered. Never, under any circumstances, move the saddle forward to make it easier to reach the bars. This will hurt your knees and, more than likely, hurt your lower back.

**A.Z. of Santa Barbara asks “Last year, a friend recommended Speed Play pedals so I purchased them and had them installed. Since I'm stronger now, I feel that my feet are rocking side-to-side now. What's going on?”**

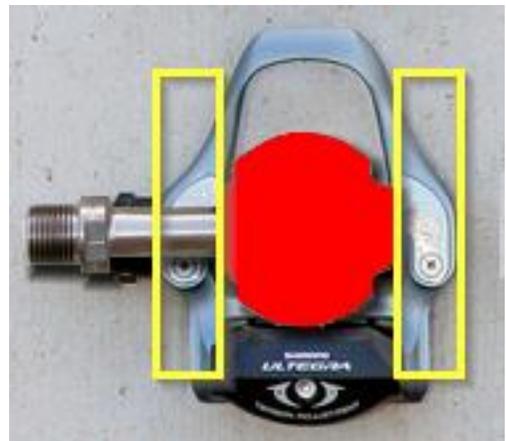
Regarding your feet rocking back and forth, there are several things to look at ... Shoes and Pedals.

1. **Shoes.**

- a. **Stiffness.** The higher the price of the shoes, the more carbon fiber they use to build the soles. This is the part of the shoe that comes into contact with your feet as well as the pedals via the cleats. Carbon fiber makes the shoes lighter and stiffer meaning that the shoes are less susceptible to bending and flexing. In contrast, lower priced shoes use more plastic and very little, if any, carbon fiber making them more prone to bending and flexing.
- b. **Sizing.** The shoes might be too big or too wide for you allowing your feet to move around in them just enough so they feel like they are rocking side to side.
- c. **Worn-Out Cleats/Pedals.** Check your cleats and pedals for excessive wear. Worn out pedals and/or cleats will make it feel that your feet are moving around left-to-right and front-to-back.

2. **Pedals.**

- a. **Surface / Contact area.** Rocking side-to-side is mostly a function of how much surface area there is where the cleat engages the pedal. There are 2 main styles of pedals, Speedplay (aka Lollipop) and delta-shape. The delta-shaped pedals have more surface area for the cleat to be supported. The picture to the right shows a Speedplay pedal superimposed on a delta-shaped pedal. The areas in yellow are additional surface area that the delta-shape pedal has over the Speedplay. This additional surface area prevents your cleats and shoes from rocking side to side. There are many choices but we aware that some have more surface area than others. Look, Time, Shimano have good pedals. For a lower price point, Performance Bike and Bike Nashbar have their own line of pedals.



**B.B. of Santa Ana asks “I got a bike fit and the next day went out on a ride. I got back and my lower back was so sore the next day that I could barely get out of bed. What did the bike fitter do to me?”**

Several things come to mind.

Depending on how many changes were made and how radical these bike fit changes were, the bike fitter should have told you to take it easy for several rides so that your body has time to acclimate itself to your new (and now correct) position. Your body had initially accommodated itself to a bad position and then got used to being in that bad position where you sacrifice power, safety and have a higher risk for injury. You might have gone on too long of a ride or pushed it too hard? Since it takes a little time for your body to get used to a new position, give it several weeks of cycling easy and after that, you should be ready to apply full power! Give it a little time.

I had a bike fit client that came back to me with the same sore back complaint. Here's the story. He originally had a bad bike fit from another fitter which resulted in chronic knee pain. A year goes by and his knee pain is getting worse and worse. He looked me up, gave me a call and we scheduled his bike re-fit on a Friday. We made some pretty substantial changes and after his bike fit, I told him to take it easy for a week or two. He called me on Sunday (2 days later) stating that his lower back now hurt so bad he could barely get out of bed, barely walk. He even asked "what did you do to me to mess me up?" Upon interviewing him, he mentioned doing hills on Saturday. I asked him which hills and how much climbing. He said he rode from his home in Irvine down the coast to Las Pulgas (Camp Pendleton). On his way home, he said he had **no knee pain** and **felt really good** so he decided to do some hills. The hills he chose are pretty substantial hills in Laguna Beach, most over 13% and one topping out over 23% grade! He said he did Nyes Place, Alta Vista, Bluebird Canyon, and Park Ave. His last hill was Newport Coast. His ride turned out to be 90 miles with almost 5,500 feet of climbing. To make matters worse, most of the climbing was in the last 20 miles. And this was the ride I told him to go easy on.

Next, I asked him how much climbing he had been doing the past year and he said **none**, no climbing since his knees hurt so much. **And there's the problem**. Climbing stresses the lower back muscles since you are pulling on the bars a lot harder than on the flats. Also, since he hadn't been stretching, his hamstrings were tight causing more pulling on the lower back. With no hill conditioning and doing 5,500 feet of climbing, no wonder his back hurt. I told him to rest and see a Physical Therapist if his back was as bad as he said it was. A couple weeks later, he called and said he was back on his bike and taking it easy.

Moral of the story, after a bike fit don't over-do it.