

ASK THE BIKE FITTER

This one question comes up repeatedly ... “My [lower] back is always sore [during and/or after a ride]. What can I do?”

To answer this, four main things (and one other) come to mind.

- 1) **Bad or No Bike Fit** – Being in the wrong position on the bike can not only cause lower back pain, but can also cause knee pain, damage to the knee, pain in the arms, neck, upper back, calves and Achilles. Couple this with worn out or, equipment that is the wrong size like stems that are too long, bars that are too wide, a saddle that causes high pressure ridges can all lead to pain and discomfort. Getting a good bike fit by a competent fitter is one of the best things you can do as a cyclist.
- 2) **Lack of Flexibility** –Most cyclists lack basic flexibility. But what is flexibility in cycling? Basically, it is how much your hamstrings will stretch before pulling on the base of your pelvis which in turn pulls on your lower back. Lack of hamstring flexibility is undoubtedly the #1 cause of lower back pain. A good daily stretching and core strengthening routine is recommended.



TEXT FROM EBOOK: Hamstrings extend the leg and flex the knee. Tight hamstrings be the cause of lower back pain. This stretch will stretch the hamstrings as well as the lower back. While sitting, knees slightly bent and trying to maintain a flat back, bend over and grab your toes. Slowly straighten out your knees. For a greater stretch, pull on your toes, which will cause you to bend further forward. The further you bend forward, the more you are stretching your hamstrings. Try and maintain a flat back. Hold for 30 seconds. Relax and do another set or two. If you can't reach your toes, bend over as far as you can. Do this stretch every day. Eventually you will be able to grab your toes and do the full stretch.



- 3) **Lack of Core Strength/Poor Posture** – A strong and engaged core helps support your entire body, especially the lower back This is especially true for cycling. A strong core helps produce power. A weak and non-engaged core allows the body to slump into a poor posture that can also lead to a sore back. Doing a daily core workout like planks along with back stretches like the one shown to the right will help to strengthen your core.



TEXT FROM EBOOK: For the next several core exercises, lie flat on your back and engage your core. You can place your hands to your sides, which will help with your balance. Keeping feet together, lift heels 6 inches (15.25 cm) off the mat and hold for 10 seconds. Raising your head and shoulders off the mat helps to keep the core engaged. Slowly lower heels (and head and shoulders) back down to mat. Repeat 10 times. Note: for a more advanced workout, you can combine these leg lifts with the next several exercises. BUT, remember that for these exercises, fully engage your core and force your lower back into the mat. Again, lifting your head and shoulders helps engage the core. This will help reduce any possible injury to the lower back.

- 4) **Poor Position on the Bike** – A flexed back instead of an extended back can cause stress on the lower back, as can a backward tilted pelvis. Rotating the pelvis forward and extending the back will unload the lower back and load the glutes which are the most powerful muscles in the body.
- 5) **Other** – Lots of things to check when getting your bike fit. Here are a couple.

- a. Leg Length Discrepancy (LLD) – Having a LLD can cause you to sit off to one side of the saddle. This twists and torques the lower back since the rest of the body is trying to sit on the bike and pedal in a straight forward position.
- b. Worn out equipment – Chamois pads can get old and bunch up, saddle padding can bunch up causing the base of the saddle to become uneven, insoles can be worn out to the point of becoming uneven as well. Worn out shoes, worn out cleats, even worn out handlebar tape can cause one hand to grip higher than the other.
- c. Back alignment issues – like Lordosis, Kyphosis or Scoliosis can also lead to excess stresses on the lower back.
- d. Saddle Too Narrow – will cause the sit bones to fall off the edge of the saddle. Your pelvis will rock back and forth and your lower back will try to stabilize you. Get the correct width saddle for support and watch your low back pain end.

| INCORRECT POSTURE | CORRECT POSTURE |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under loaded Glutes and Hamstrings = LOST POWER • Low Back and Shoulder FATIGUE • Increased Weight Bearing in Hands • Poor Core Stabilization = LOST POWER | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loaded Glutes and Hamstrings = INCREASED POWER • Low Back and Shoulder RELIEF • Decreased Weight Bearing in Hands • Poor Core Stabilization = INCREASED POWER |

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