

CYCLING AND BACK PAIN

by Julie E. Levine, DO



Men and women can be found cycling on many metro Atlanta roads all year long. It is a great way to stay in shape and get a great cardio workout. Despite the healthy aspects of cycling, studies have shown that **up to 60 percent of cyclists suffer from back pain** and approximately 50 percent suffer from neck pain.

The naturally hunched-over posture inherent to cycling can cause spinal problems, even for younger riders. The position of flexion of the back and extension of the neck causes pain due to overuse in a nonanatomic position. In this article, I will discuss options to help cyclists enjoy their sport while helping to decrease neck and back pain.

Select the Best Bicycle for Your Purpose

Selecting a bike that meets your needs can help you prevent back pain during your ride. A road bike is the general term that is used for traditional bikes that are designed for good performance on pavement. The two types of road bikes are racing and touring and have either drop or aero handlebars that allow the rider to achieve an aerodynamic riding position while finding a comfortable hand position. An alternative to a road bike is a hybrid, which is a blend between a road bike and a mountain bike.

Racing bikes are designed for pure speed. They are lightweight and allow the rider to utilize a more aggressive riding posture.

Touring bikes are designed to carry load while sustaining comfort. They utilize a more upright riding position and have

heavier components for durability and mounts for rack and fender attachments.

Hybrid bikes can be used as all-purpose bikes that can tolerate a wide range of terrain. Their comfort and stability make them a good choice for casual riders, commuters and children alike.

Increasing Your Core Strength

Ensuring that you have a strong core helps reduce body fatigue by providing a stable platform to help secure your leg muscles, increase your power and support your upper body during your ride. Core strength encompasses more than just crunches that develop your abdominal muscles but don't provide a lot of stability.

Exercise programs like Pilates and yoga can create strong core muscles that will keep your spine aligned while you ride. *(To learn more about the benefits of yoga, see Dr. Dows-Martinez's article on page 6.)* As a bonus, these exercises will also increase your flexibility and help decrease the strain on your back. In addition, they will help reduce the fatigue in your lower back, shoulders, arms, legs and hands during your ride.

Use Proper Riding Position

Using the proper riding position of an arch in your back is one of the biggest factors that helps to decrease the risk of back pain while cycling.

To help you maintain your back in the arched position and decrease your risk of back pain and injury during your ride, consider getting your bike fitted for you by an expert. He or she will ensure that your handlebars, seat height and seat angle are correct for you.

Make Sure Your Bike Is the Right Size for You

If you're experiencing frequent back pain while you are cycling, it is important to make sure that your bike is fitted to your frame. Not only will this help to decrease your risk of back pain, but it also helps prevent injuries to your neck, knees, arms and wrists.

Consult a Doctor to Check Your Leg Length

Many people have leg-length discrepancies (LLD) resulting in a misalignment of the spine. This can result in lower back pain. This can be exacerbated in cyclists, especially those who travel long distances several times a week. If you have continued back pain while cycling, you may benefit from a

visit to a physician to check your leg length for a discrepancy.

In Conclusion

If you continue to experience nagging back or neck pain while cycling, the physicians and therapists at Resurgens Spine Center can help diagnose your condition and recommend a course of treatment to get you back out on the road again.



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