

## Cycling and back pain

Today, with growing concerns about the environment and increasing difficulties in commuting, many of us are opting to get on a **bike** rather than drive or brave public transport. Whether you choose to ride to and from work or you are employed in a job that requires you to ride, as a bike courier for example, cycling is both an excellent way to **keep fit** and get around. However, estimates suggest that anywhere between **30-70%** of us will get back **pain** when cycling. This pain can be caused by a variety of reasons but the good news is there are simple things you can do to ensure that you do not develop back pain or you manage your back pain and prevent it from becoming long term and debilitating.

### What causes back pain when riding?

Back pain when riding may be caused by;

- Bad riding posture
- The wrong sized bike
- The wrong type of bike
- Improperly positioned handlebars
- Improperly positioned saddles
- Weak back muscles
- Weak stomach/core muscles
- Prolonged riding/sitting
- Riding on rough terrain.



### Top tips

- ✓ Make sure that you **stop** and take **breaks** when riding long distances
- ✓ During your breaks **stretch** and move around to loosen stiff muscles
- ✓ Make sure that your bike is the **correct** bike for you. See an expert if necessary to ensure that your bike is the right **height, size and type** to suit you and your riding needs, style or preference
- ✓ **Position** the handle bar, saddle etc of your bike correctly for your comfort. For example, make sure the saddle is not too high or too low
- ✓ Stand up whenever you can while riding or at traffic lights to ensure you are **moving** and your back is not in the same position throughout
- ✓ Do **exercises** that strengthen your back and core muscles such as sit ups, crunches and the plank (if you are able)
- ✓ Maintain good cycling **posture** – don't hunch over too far, but bend over from the hips. Don't sway side to side when pedalling. Don't grip the handlebars too tightly and be careful of wrist/ arm position
- ✓ If your job involves riding **talk** to your **employer** or someone in the **HR department** about your back pain as they may be able to help find ways to resolve the problem e.g. get you a new bike
- ✓ Professional cyclists or long distance cyclists use different bikes and adopt a different posture on their bike than people using their bike for shorter rides. Before buying a new bike, try various bikes and find out which one suits your body and riding style. Ask for a trial ride before purchasing a new bike.

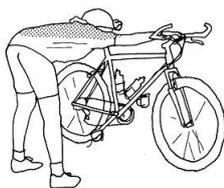
### Useful exercises

Cycling helps to keep us fit which is the best way to try to prevent or manage back pain. Here are some simple exercises you can try to help keep you on your bike. If you have an existing back condition, you may want to skip exercises that exacerbate your pain.

## Before riding

### Arms, shoulder and back stretch

- Place your hands on your bike's saddle and handle bar
- Step back a few steps
- Bend your back until it is at a right angle to the ground
- Hold the stretch for 15 seconds.



### Upper back and shoulder stretch

- Clasp your hands together behind your back
- Slowly raise your arms behind you until you feel a stretch
- Hold for 10 seconds then lower arms
- Repeat four times.



## When taking a break

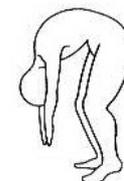
### Side stretch

- Stand with your feet slightly apart
- Grab your left elbow with your right hand and your right elbow with your left hand above your head
- Slowly pull your left elbow to the right with your right hand until you feel a stretch. Hold for five seconds
- Return to upright position and do the same on the left
- Repeat four times (each side).



### Toe touch

- Bend forward at your lower back to touch your toes
- Try to keep your knees straight but if this is difficult you may bend them
- Hold for 20 seconds then return to original position.



## After a ride

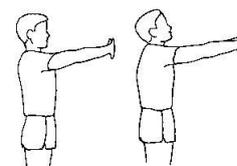
### Lower back stretch

- Place your palms on your lower back fingers facing downwards
- Slowly arch your back and stick out your chest while slightly leaning backwards. Hold for 15 seconds then return to original position
- Repeat three times.



### Upper back stretch

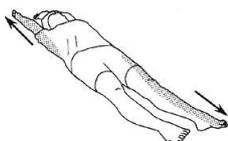
- Clasp your hands together, palms facing forward. Extend your arms in front of your body and hold this position for 10 seconds then relax
- Repeat three times.



## At home

### Diagonal stretch

- Point the toes of your left foot as you extend your right arm
- Stretch as far as is comfortable
- Hold for five seconds, and then relax
- Stretch the right leg and left arm the same way
- Repeat four times (on each side).



### Seated back and hip stretch

- Sit with your left hand behind you and your left leg bent and crossed over resting outside your right knee
- Place right elbow outside your left thigh
- Slowly turn to look over your left shoulder while rotating your upper body as far as you can for the stretch
- Hold for 10 seconds. Release, and then do the same for the other side
- Repeat four times (each side).



**For more information on looking after your back when cycling contact BackCare or visit [www.backcare.org.uk](http://www.backcare.org.uk)**

Information sheets made available by BackCare are provided for information only and should not be considered as medical recommendations or advice. Medical information is often controversial and continually changing. BackCare is not responsible for errors or omissions in the information. Some of the information may come from outside of the UK. This means for example, that some of the drug names may be different, and the sources of help quoted are not available in the UK. Please consult your GP or Specialist to discuss any specific concerns or if you are considering changing treatment in any way e.g. adding dietary supplements or different exercise routines.

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