



READY TO RIDE - Orthopaedic Surgeon, Dr Richard Pope explains the basics every aspiring cyclist should know before hitting the road

With the Tour Down Under rapidly approaching, the cycling buss is well and truly in the air. If the bug has bitten, it's important to make your first stop a professional cycling store.

The right stuff

A good bike with correct gearing is essential, and be sure to have it adjusted in the store by an expert - the correct seat and handlebar height are vital. It's easier to maintain your balance, and if you're using cleats, it's important to have correct adjustment so you can clip in and out quickly when required.

A lot of repetitive strain injuries also occur when bikes are not adjusted properly. For example, if your back is bent forward more than it should be, and you're riding for several hours in a position that is far from optimal, you can be prone to backache, and tendonitis in the knee, hip and ankle. Another problem that many cyclists do not consider affects the urological system, particularly in men, when the wrong seats are fitted. There are specially designed bike seats now available to avoid these problems, and make your ride far more comfortable.

When it comes to other equipment, an outrageously expensive bike is not crucial, but do keep in mind that the lighter the bike, the heavier the price tag. A helmet and highly visible apparel are essential, including gloves and lights (both front and back.) Ensure they are fitted at all times to avoid being a danger to both yourself and other road users.

Crunch time

Contrary to popular belief most cycling injuries are not sustained from car accidents. Repetitive strain on the back, knee, hip and ankle are common, as is hypothermia and dehydration. Remember to maintain a good calorie intake and drink lots of fluids, including high calorie sports drinks - especially to avoid loss of concentration which can result in collisions when trying to avoid obstacles.

Injuries are most often sustained from falling off a bike at a great speed. As you'll generally fall to the side, the shoulder is often first to hit and so, takes most of the impact. This can result in clavicle fracture or an acromioclavicular joint disruption, wrist and scaphoid fractures, and occasionally major femur and tibia fractures.

Falling can be caused by many factors and may occur from cycling within a group. With many cyclists now riding as part of a club it's important to stick to strict peloton etiquette. Many new cyclists will also fall when they start using shoe cleats, so ensure that you start out in areas with minimum traffic.

Saddle up

When embarking on your new sport, some good preparation in the gym can really pay off. Start out by riding on quiet roads, and remember to increase your distance progressively - some people burn themselves out too quickly, finding themselves exhausted and 20 kilometres from home. Mix your rides up with flat and hilly areas, and stay hydrated. Routine stretches are great, and of course take a recovery break for the compulsory cup of coffee!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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