



Stay in the Saddle

Don't let the prospect of a sore seat keep you from enjoying a nice long bike ride. Take steps to prevent saddle sores and learn how to treat them when they occur so you can get back on the saddle.

It's hard to think of anything that's not great about cycling, but if you had to name one thing it would definitely be saddle sores. Saddle sores are painful areas of the skin that develop when bacteria infects surface abrasions caused by rubbing in the seat area. Untreated, these sores may continually reopen and become hard to heal abscesses that equal serious discomfort.

But don't let the prospect of a saddle sore seat keep you from enjoying a nice long bike ride. Follow these tips to stay in the saddle.

- **Wear appropriate cycling shorts or bibs:** Look for shorts or bibs with a seamless chamois. Always change out of your cycling clothes and shower as soon as practical after each ride. And be sure to wash your gear after every use.
- **Find the right saddle:** One key is to find a saddle where the sit bones width matches your physiology; and more padding does not necessarily mean greater comfort.

“When we cycled across the United States, before the first leg of our 8 year adventure, I made the mistake of beginning the ride on a brand new saddle,” says team co-captain Kevin Burns. “By day two, I started getting saddle sores and by day six, I was in real trouble. I visited my local shop on my return and found out that the new saddle was narrower than my old saddle, and it had a different saddle cover material. For the rest of our journey, I had a saddle that not only fit me, but was well broken in.”

The best way to be comfortable on a bike saddle though is to ride your bike!

- **Get a bike fit from your local bike shop:** Every rider is different, so finding the right saddle that fits your body geometry may take several test rides. In general, if you are rocking side to side or find yourself reaching for the pedals, then your saddle is too high. Proper bike fit and seat height is important for saddle comfort. Seat set back must also be properly adjusted so you are properly settled in the saddle's sweet spot. Sit bones should be on the wider, padded part of the saddle.
- **Take a stand:** Get out of the saddle when riding! Standing on the pedals frequently will reduce pressure and restore circulation.

“For example, when you are going up a hill, you are pedaling harder and getting off the saddle for a few minutes,” says Dr. Bill Bryan, team co-captain. “If your ride route is flat, just stand on the pedals for at least 30 seconds every 15 minutes to give yourself a break from the saddle.”

- **Stop to rest:** Rest stops are there for a reason! Dr. Kathy Shadle, Team Houston Methodist training coordinator, says to take advantage of rest stops to get a drink and give your bottom a break during long rides.
- **Apply some lube:** Professionals use Chamois BUTT'r or Bag Balm to coat their seat area before putting on cycling shorts in order to reduce friction and chafing. Apply the product to your sit area



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and/or to the chamois to maximize comfort. Wash up: Be sure to remove your cycling gear and take a shower immediately after each ride in order to limit the chance that bacteria can grow on any abrasions you suffer.

If you do get saddle sores, don't feel bad, even professional riders can't avoid them all the time.

"Remember all saddle sore issues are due to pressure or friction. Put on your thinking cap and analyze your problem," says Dr. Bryan.

The more you ride, the longer you'll be able to sit in the saddle without getting sore. If the discomfort gets too intense:

- **Take a few days off:** simply avoiding your bicycle seat allows saddles sores time to heal without additional rubbing.
- **Baby your bottom:** Diaper-rash creams, such as zinc oxide, antibiotic creams, benzoyl peroxide creams and even Preparation H can reduce pain, shrink swollen tissue and speed up healing.
- **Medicate:** Use over the counter pain relief such as ibuprofen, or see your doctor for prescription antibiotics if saddles sores become worse or do not heal after appropriate measures.