

# TOO MUCH, TOO FAST

## SEVEN WAYS TO BEAT EARLY-SEASON OVERUSE INJURIES

### I'M EXHAUSTED, KNACKERED, TRASHED

**CAUSES:** Increasing mileage and intensity too quickly. Trying to reach mid-season form in April. In short, you're doing too much, too soon, bucko.

**QUICK FIX:** When you increase time and intensity on the bike, do it gradually. The body likes regular, moderate changes, not revolutions. So heed this time-tested advice: Don't increase mileage more than 10% per week.

**OTHER FIXES:** Analyze your total stress load. Sure, pro riders do 20–30 weekly hours, much of it at race-pace, while us mortals manage 3–10 if we're lucky. But pro riders put in their 30 hours and then flop on the couch, pampered by masseurs, physicians, and team personnel. You and me? We have to squeeze cycling into days shortened by all the administrivia of life. You can control how much you ride, but you can't control your boss's demands. So start gradually and monitor how you feel. If you aren't eager to ride, back off until the zest returns.

—Fred Matheny

### MY BUTT HURTS

**CAUSES:** ill-fitting shorts, poor position on the bike, poor hygiene, riding in the rain without proper apparel.

**QUICK FIX:**

Invest in a good pair of cycling shorts with a chamois that's compatible with your anatomy. Women should look for a chamois with a women-specific "baseball" cut. Use a good chamois lube such as Chamois Butt'R, (888/411-0287; MO) or petroleum jelly every time you ride. Wash shorts after each use. Don't wear underwear beneath your shorts!

**OTHER FIXES:** Lower your saddle slightly— if you have to reach for the pedals, you're sawing tender tissue across the saddle nose on each pedal stroke, irritating the skin. Gently wash your crotch with mild soap and water before and after each ride. Don't stand around in wet shorts. If it's raining, use extra lube on your chamois and keep your shorts dry, either by using fenders or a long-tailed jacket. If you're susceptible to saddle sores, see a physician about a prescription for erythromycin, a topical antibiotic.

—Bernard Burton, M.D.

### MY KNEE HURTS

**CAUSES:** Faulty saddle height, excessively large gears, a slow cadence, cold weather, too much leg work in the gym.

**QUICK FIX:** For frontal knee pain, raise your saddle 2–3 mm. For pain at the rear of the knee, lower it the same amount. Ice, and take non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen. Keep your legs covered in temperatures below 65 degrees fahrenheit.

**OTHER FIXES:** Choose gears that allow a cadence of at least 80rpm. Alternate standing and sitting on long climbs to distribute the stresses to different parts of the knee. Phase out heavy leg work in the gym when you increase mileage. Get a complete bike fit (see a bike-savvy sports medicine doc or a Cycling-certified coach) with an emphasis on saddle height and cleat alignment. Reduce mileage and intensity by 20–30% for 7–10 days.

—Andrew Pruitt, Ed.D.

### NUMB AND TINGLY HANDS

**CAUSES:** Compression of the ulnar nerve between the bones of the hand and handlebar.

**QUICK FIX:** Use a firm but relaxed grip on the bar. Change hand positions frequently. Try padded gloves, cork handlebar tape (road bike) or cushy grips (mountain bike). If you use a mountain bikes flat or rise handlebar, always ride with straight wrists— don't let them bend under the bar.

**OTHER FIXES:** Alter your position so you sit more upright to reduce pressure on your hands. Do this with a shorter stem or rise bar on a mountain bike; a shorter stem, more spacers in the headset or a new frame with a shorter top tube for a road bike. Install an aero bar. Try ice, ultrasound, NSAIDs. Severe cases require surgical decompression of the nerve.

—Alan Bragman, D.C.

### MY TOES GO NUMB AND THE SOLES OF MY FEET BURN

**CAUSES:** Compression of the nerves between the metatarsal bones of the forefoot from tight shoes, road vibration or too much climbing.

**QUICK FIX:** Move your cleats to the rear of your shoe 2–3 mm. Loosen your shoe straps. Replace the insole with a thinner one

and try thinner socks. Install a more cushioned insole.

**OTHER FIXES:** See a cycling-qualified podiatrist or sports medicine professional for orthotics to reduce irritation on the nerves. Have a qualified shoemaker stretch your shoes at the forefoot or get a wider pair. In severe cases, you may need anti-inflammatory injections. Examine your shoes for irregular seams, straps and buckles that might be pressing against the bump on the outer edge of the foot. Riders with high arches or who over-pronate are at risk because they experience more pressure on the balls of the feet.

—Douglas Ehrenberg, D.P.M.

### MY SHOULDERS AND NECK HURT

**CAUSES:** Improper bike fit, craning the neck from an excessively low handlebar, road shock, or fatigue.

**QUICK FIX:** Raise your handlebar with a higher-rise stem. Do some on-bike stretching by putting your hands on bar tops, and raising your shoulders toward your ears and slowly lowering them. Apply ice packs for 10–15 minutes.

**OTHER FIXES:** The long-term solution is a combo of strengthening and daily stretching. To strengthen, contract the neck muscles for a few seconds while pushing against the front, back and sides of the head. To stretch, move your head until your ear is on your shoulder. Hold for 30 seconds, and then repeat on the other side. Finally, take your neck through its full range of motion to the front and rear, holding for 30 seconds at each end point.

—Alan Bragman, D.C.

### I HAVE RAZOR RASH

**CAUSES:** The razor makes small abrasions where the hair emerges from the skin, causing superficial infections.

**QUICK FIX:** Use a quality shaving gel and a sharp razor. Wash the skin carefully before shaving, and try an over-the-counter benzoyl peroxide product.

**OTHER FIXES:** Acne-like breakouts in shaving areas are common, and cyclists are particularly prone to this type of "bacterial folliculitis" due to perspiration. The best cure: See a physician for a prescription preparation such as 0.5% hydrocortisone in Cieocin-T solution.

—Rodney Basler, M.D.