

## Cycling – preventing injury

Cycling is an enjoyable activity for all ages, whether it's a leisurely ride with the family or a race in an elite cycling competition. Cycling can improve your physical and mental health, and it's a great way to get out and enjoy the world around you. However, bicycle injuries can occur.

Cyclists account for about 75 per cent of transport injuries. About six cyclists out of every 10 who are injured are children, aged five to 14 years. Only seven per cent of transport-related cycling injuries involve collisions with other vehicles. You are much more likely to hurt yourself by falling off your bike or hitting a stationary object.

Other common causes of cycling-related injuries include incorrect riding postures, demanding too much of your body, and faulty equipment.

### Common bicycling injuries

Common injuries may result in:

- Lower back pain
- Numb toes or burning feet
- Hand damage
- Shoulder pain
- Knee damage.

### Lower back pain

The back can be a weak link for many riders. Cyclists usually develop strong leg muscles but don't always have the torso strength to support and resist the force from the legs. This forces the back to overwork and spasm, causing rapid fatigue.

#### Prevention tip:

Get into the habit of standing and riding with a straight back. This will ease the lower back pain and also improve your riding.

### Numb toes or burning feet

Numbness or 'burning feet' is most commonly caused when the nerves are squashed. This is usually due to tight shoes, road vibration or too much climbing (which puts continuous pressure on the feet).

#### Prevention tips:

- Slight adjustments to your shoes, straps or cleats on a riding shoe may correct any problems.
- Make sure your feet are straight when you clip into the pedals if you use cleats.
- Remove any irregular seams, straps or buckles from your shoe that may be pressing against your foot.

### Hand injury

The earliest sign of a hand injury is tingling or numbness in the palm or fingers.

#### Prevention tips:

- Observe how you are gripping the handlebars. The grip should be firm yet relaxed.
- Change hand positions frequently.
- Remember to keep the wrist straight.
- Try padded gloves or handlebar tape to reduce the vibration.

Children aged 10 years or less are at risk of trapping fingers in the moving parts of a bicycle, such as the chain. Children should be warned about these hazards. It may be wise to consider buying a bicycle that has a shield over the chain.

### Shoulder pain

Injury to the shoulder usually occurs during longer rides. It is mainly caused by placing too much weight on the hands, and riding with straight elbows.

#### Prevention tip:

- Keep the elbows slightly flexed to stop the 'road shock' transferring to the arms and upper body. This will reduce the risk of shoulder injury.

### Knee injury

Knee injury is generally due to overuse, and occurs when a cyclist is doing too much too fast.

#### Prevention tips:

- Slowly build up your strength through training to minimise strain on the knees, and reduce the amount of hard training or hill work.
- Adjust the height of your seat – this will ease the pressure on the knee. If the seat is too high or too low, stress is placed on the knees. Seek the advice of a professional bike fitter to determine the appropriate height for your seat.

See over...

## Maintain the bicycle

It is vital to maintain the bicycle in good working order. Children, particularly those of primary school age, are most at risk of injury from equipment failure. Common equipment failures include:

- **Slipped chain** – the chain comes off while the bike is in motion.
- **Wheel loss** – the wheel (commonly the front) comes off while the bike is in motion.
- **Handlebar malfunction** – for example, the handlebars break, fall off or come loose. This can result in the rider losing control of the bike.
- **Broken pedals** – the pedal comes loose or breaks while the bike is in motion.

## Brake smoothly

Hard braking is a common cause of cycling injuries. This can cause the brakes to lock and the rider to fall over the handlebars. Children need careful instruction on how to brake safely.

## Where to get help

- Smartplay Victoria Tel. (03) 9674 8777
- Bicycle Victoria Tel. (03) 8636 8888
- VicRoads Tel. 131 171
- 'Go for your life' Infoline service Tel. 1300 73 98 99

## Things to remember

- Common causes of cycling-related injuries include incorrect riding postures, demanding too much of your body, and faulty equipment.
- Only seven per cent of cycling injuries involve collisions with other vehicles – you are much more likely to hurt yourself by falling off your bike or hitting a stationary object.
- Children, particularly those of primary school age, are most at risk of injury.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by Smartplay Victoria. The Better Health Channel is part of the Department of Human Services, Victoria

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