



Your aching back

By Andy Applegate

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Many cyclists complain of a sore lower back. As we approach the middle of the year, even riders who don't normally experience this pain may find it cropping up after long, hard training days or races. There are at least three major issues that may lead to this nagging problem.

1. Bike fit: If your fit is incorrect, or even a little out of adjustment it could put unnecessary stress on back muscles.

Improper saddle height, fore aft, or handlebar reach and height are some of the parameters that may be affecting you. Even if you've been fitted in the past, it may be time for another visit to a reputable fit specialist.

2. Weak core: Your core (lower back and abdomen) muscles stabilize all the force your legs are putting into the pedals. If you think about the way most of this force is applied, one leg at a time in the power phase of the down stroke, it becomes clear that this is no small issue. Doing some strength work for this area usually helps immensely.

Doing simple crunches on the ground several times per week is a good start. If you have a fit ball, crunches with the ball under your lower back will activate even more muscles. Back extensions can be done on the ball as well. Even if you spent time in the off-season strengthening these muscles, but have neglected them lately, this could be a part of the back-pain problem.

3. Tense muscles: Unnecessarily tense muscles in any part of the back or upper body could be an issue as well. All muscles not being used to propel the bike forward should be as relaxed as possible. It's amazing how tense these muscles can become if you don't consciously try to stay relaxed.

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