

GET READY TO RIDE

Whether you're a weekend warrior or a new rider, here's what you need to know to make the most of your workout on wheels.

BY KATE DALEY

SIT TIGHT

The biggest complaint among new cyclists is a sore bottom, says Alison Sydor, an Olympic silver medallist in cycling from West Vancouver. She suggests buying cycling shorts with a chamois to cushion the ride and a women's ergonomic seat. Your sit bones should be situated on the widest part of the saddle. And don't arch your back, says Kim Donnelly, owner of CYKL studio in Toronto. That puts pressure on your pubic bone because you rock forward on your pelvis as you move your legs.

KEEP UP

To help prevent neck and back strain, keep your elbows bent, your shoulders relaxed and your lower back flat. To avoid rounded shoulders caused by cycling, cross-train off the bike with upright rows. (With your elbows bent and your palms facing down, hold a lightweight barbell. Lift it until it almost reaches your chin.)



BE A SPEED DEMON

Buy a bike computer that tracks your cadence (the speed at which you pedal, measured in revolutions per minute, or RPM) and try to keep it between 85 and 100 RPM. When you're ascending a hill, stay seated as long as possible, because that's the position in which you use the least amount of energy. When you're going downhill, put the bike into a higher gear and keep pedalling to stay stable. Lightly (and evenly) apply the brakes to slow down, says Sydor.

POWER THE PEDAL

The biggest mistake many cyclists make is pointing their toes. If you don't drop your heels, you lose power because you aren't using your glutes, explains Donnelly. For the best workout, invest in a pair of cycling shoes and clipless pedals. Think of your pedal stroke as the face of a clock: Between 11 and two o'clock, engage the balls of your feet to keep them flat, and between five and seven o'clock, use your hamstrings by pulling your legs up and pushing your heels to the back of your shoes.

FIND THE RIGHT FIT

The most important part of getting started is making sure your bike fits you perfectly. "Cycling should not be an uncomfortable experience," says Sydor. Things to consider include the size of the bike frame, the seat height (your legs should have a 25- to 30-degree bend when extended) and the position of the saddle. Get a proper bike fit at your local cycling shop.

GO HARD CORE

Power transfers from one leg to the other go through your core, so strong abs are key. If you have lower-back pain while biking, it's usually because your core is weak. To get stronger, start by doing one 30-second plank three times a week. ■



Find our roundup of the best bike gear at canadianliving.com/bikegear.