



South Downs Osteopathy

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Advice Sheet: Optimum Cycling Position

Cycling is a great way to get out in the fresh air, enjoy the scenery, get from A to B and enjoy a form of exercise that is accessible to most of us. For the average person it should not cause significant strain on the arms, legs, back or neck. If you find you are suffering discomfort from cycling, try these tips to set up your bike for a more comfortable riding position (you might need to ask a friend to help make sure you are set up correctly):

1. Saddle Height

This should be slightly higher than your inside leg measurement, so that you can comfortably sit on the bike with the balls of your feet supporting you on the ground. Next, with your pedal at its lowest point, place your heel on the centre of the pedal with the crank at 6 o'clock. You should be able to straighten your leg and lock your knee whilst still seated on the saddle so that the crank arm is in line with the angle of your shinbone. Now double check the position with your foot correctly placed on the pedal (the ball of the foot should be over the centre of the pedal): with the crank in the 6 o'clock position your knee should be slightly bent and with the crank at 12 o'clock, the knee should not go above the level of the saddle. Taller people may find they need longer crank arms to achieve this, while shorter people may need shorter crank arms.

2. Saddle position

You may find you need to move the saddle forwards/backwards on its rails. To check this, sit with the balls of your feet on the pedals and move the cranks into a horizontal position. Your knee joint should be vertical to the centre of the pedal or just behind.

3. Handlebars

This is a personal preference but as a guide the crossbar of your handlebars should be roughly the height of your saddle. Slightly lower gives a more aerodynamic position but requires the lower back to curve more. Slightly higher will reduce strain on the lower back but also increase wind resistance and therefore the effort required to pedal. A happy medium is to use drop handlebars or bar end extensions on straighter handlebars, which both allow the rider to adopt different riding positions as needed. The handlebars should be roughly shoulder width so that the ribcage is not restricted when riding, allowing better ventilation.

4. Pedals

Even if you are only cycling for very short periods, toe clips or a clipless pedal/cleated shoe combination will significantly reduce the strain on your thighs as they allow power to be applied more evenly through both legs whether they are on the upstroke or downstroke. Whichever you choose, they should be adjusted so that the ball of your foot is over the centre of the pedal (or just behind if you have small feet).

The new riding position may feel very strange or even uncomfortable at first. Make sure you let your body adjust gradually, starting with short rides and gradually building the distance as you acclimatise to the new set-up. If you are still experiencing problems, I would recommend visiting a reputable specialist cycling shop and ask them to check your set-up; it may even be that the frame is the wrong size or shape for your body. If your set-up is correct but you are still experiencing pain or discomfort you might find that visiting an osteopath can relieve the symptoms and help your body to adapt more easily to your riding position.

For more information about osteopathy or to book an appointment, please visit my website or contact me via the email address or telephone number above.

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