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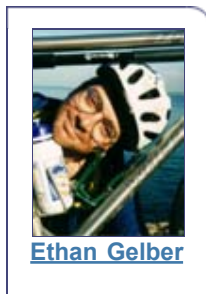
### Proper Pedaling

#### Cheryle's Question.

**I have a hybrid. What is the best foot position for pedaling? Should you keep your feet flat and pedal with your foot flexed or should you pedal using your toes first?**

#### Ethan Gelber's Answer.

The position of your feet on the pedals and how you use them when you stroke (go through the full circular pedaling motion) are very important. Pedal poorly and you could run the risk of hurting yourself. Pedal more efficiently and you will definitely improve your cycling form and results.



#### Foot Position

The ideal foot position is with the ball of the foot directly over the axle of the pedal. This should be the case whether you are using toe clips, clipless pedals, or nothing at all. The first two devices will help you to achieve this since they are designed with proper foot placement in mind, but you will need to be vigilant when you are cycling without clips or cleats.

If the force of your pedaling is coming from your toes or the arch of your foot, you run the risk of hurting your knees since the force of your pedaling is not being properly transferred.

You should also make sure that the rest of your [bike is properly adjusted](#), especially the [forward/backward position of the saddle](#). When either foot is in the three o'clock position, your knee should be directly over the ball of your foot. In fact, if you were to drop a plumb line from your knee, it should pass right through the ball of your foot.

#### Stroke

A lot of time has been spent analyzing the pedal stroke. Most amateur riders don't think much about this, using instinct to place pressure on the pedals on the alternating down strokes. There is nothing wrong with

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this. However, the more time you spend in the saddle, the more you should be interested in using the full circular stroke to your best advantage, increasing the power output from your effort into forward motion. Simple pushes only on the down strokes means you are only getting power into less than half of the full stroke.

Ideally, your pedaling stroke should be fluid. You should be able to follow the full stroke through four different motions corresponding to the four different parts of the full-circle revolution. They can be summarized as follows:

- the down stroke (approximately two o'clock to five o'clock), when you should push down
- the back pull (approximately five o'clock to seven o'clock), when you should feel like you're scraping your feet on a welcome mat
- the up stroke (approximately seven o'clock to eleven o'clock), when you should pull up slightly but relax a bit since you will be on the down stroke of the opposite foot
- the forward pull (approximately eleven o'clock to two o'clock), when you should pull slightly forward.

The schematic is distinctly rectangular, but the motion becomes smooth and circular the more you focus on it.

In terms of foot position while you are going through the motions, your foot should be flat on the down stroke, flat at the back pull, can be slightly angled with the toe pointed down during the up stroke, and then flat again on the forward pull (although a slight flex here can change the foot angle enough to give you more leverage as you prepare for the down stroke. Whatever you do, try to keep from pointing your toes down on the down stroke and the back pull. This places unusual strains in a number of places (especially at the back of the ankle) and can lead to painful inflammations.

A couple of good ways to improve your stroke include using indoor rollers (a device for off-season training consisting of horizontal spinning rollers on which you place the bike without securing it); this will necessarily help you to improve your spinning technique, especially when you get going at steady and high rpms) and training for short (15-minute) stretches using only one leg at a time.

For lots more information about fitting your bike to suit your body, see [Adjusting a Bicycle](#).

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