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## ACTIVITIES

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## Expert Answers

### Sore about Saddle Sore?

#### Susan's Question.

**OK, let's cut through casual conversation and get to what everyone wants to know, but most are too embarrassed to ask: I want the tried and true prevention and remedies for saddle sores!**

#### Ethan Gelber's Answer.

First off, let's tackle some potentially confusing terminology. As far as I know, there is *being saddle sore* and there are *saddle sores*. The former is a classic and familiar grumble from all beginning cyclists and people who have been out of the saddle for too long. The latter is a bitter result of steps not taken to let a minor problem get worse.



[Ethan Gelber](#)

Let's deal first with the more common complaint: saddle soreness.

Remember the day after the first time you ran more than a mile? Remember the day after the first time you rode a horse? Remember the day after the first time you worked on an exercise machine? You were sore right? Well, the first few days after the first few times you cycle more than a few miles, guess what, you will be sore. Your legs may hurt, the middle of your back may hurt, your shoulders may hurt, and, yes, your butt will hurt. You see, there's muscle in there. And every time you suddenly use a muscle unaccustomed to use, it is going to be sore. That's just part of the way it goes. That said, many riders when they are sore rub different kinds of balms into the sore areas. This works for some, not for others.

But, like all muscles, your butt can be trained to deal. What you need to think about — and what can be a real problem — is enduring soreness. There are a number of reasons why this may happen. First, your saddle may not be right for you. With today's technology and improved awareness in sports medicine, there are many different kinds of bicycle saddles, each responding to

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different anatomical (particularly perineal and gender-specific) needs. Try a few. Many bike shops have saddles you can borrow and test before buying. Or consult with friends, asking if you can test ride their saddles. Find one that fits you.

Second, ensure that your saddle position and height are set to your needs. If you are sitting too high in the saddle your hips may be rocking when you pedal and you may be rubbing against the saddle more than you should; you may also be pitched too far forward and the nose of the saddle may be putting pressure on parts better unpresed. If the saddle is too low, your knees may be bending too much and stressing in unnecessary ways. The level part of your saddle should also be kept parallel with the floor (unless you know you like it otherwise). Tilted too far up at the front and there's that pressure again. Tilted too far back and you may be rubbing the saddle the wrong way.

Finally, bike shorts were designed for many reasons: to put seamless padding where it is most needed, to reduce sweat where you should be kept dry, and to cut down on chafing. Yes, they are skintight and make the self-conscious feel even more so, but they serve a very good purpose. Two more hints: Do not wear underwear with bike shorts and only wear light shorts with seams that don't run under your crotch. Also, you might consider rubbing some petroleum jelly on the chamois (the material in the crotch of the shorts) to prevent rubbing when you ride.

Which brings us to saddle sores. Saddle sores may be the result of prolonged riding with any of the above conditions. Once you have sores, you should seriously avoid riding until your discomfort has passed. Use lubricants (like petroleum jelly) to reduce further rubbing and irritation from wearing clothes and walking. Wear loose clothes. And use common sense: If it gets bad, use medicated creams and powders to keep the irritated area disinfected.

Basically, as with all things, if something hurts, something is wrong. Adjust, replace, change . . . and figure out what works best for you. This also holds true when riding. Keep shifting your position in the saddle. This will help move the pressure around. That's good life advice too.

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