

Stretching for cyclists

Why bother to stretch?

Reduce injury?

Increase muscle length?

Aid recovery?

Aid performance?

There seems to be a lot of conflicting information about stretching at the moment: some experts say do stretch, some say don't and there is research to prove both lines of thoughts.

So where does that leave the athlete? Normally confused.

Taking into consideration all the research I can get my hands on and from clinical experiences, I believe this to be best:

First of all, any stretching program should be specific to your personal needs (muscle lengths, muscle imbalance) and sports specific (what range of movement your sports requires and the range of speed needed e.g. sprint action or endurance.

I have found that most people go wrong with stretching when they:

1) only stretch what they find they are good at (human nature, we hate to work on the bad things.)

2) do incorrect stretching for their needs or sports, put too much tension on fatigued muscle, stretching cold, hold stretches in poor position which cause excess tension on other parts of the body.

Get to know your body, think about your sport and what parts of the body you use.

Don't stretch through pain.

Don't rush getting into position.

Try and relax and breath into the stretch increasing the stretch as your body allows.

Try and hold the stretch for at least 45sec.

Don't compromise other muscles or joints to achieve stretch.

Cycling flexibility needs: if you want to be able to achieve the most powerful position and help to reduce pain/injury on the bike, there a few basics you need to try and achieve. The most important is the **back line**. From the under side of your foot(sole) calf, hamstring, gluts, lower back muscles till your lower ribcage. And also the **front line**: hip flexors and quads (from bottom of rib cage to the knee). Why??? As you need to be able to achieve forward flexion at the hip and lower back (see photo 1.1)



A cyclist with short hamstrings and glut muscles will not be able to achieve a deep position on the bike and will have problems ranging from pain in any back line muscle to loss of power.



(See in photo 1. 2) The cyclist can achieve optimal efficiency with this range of hip rotation. Why there is no unnecessary tension on muscle tissue, nerves or joints being overloaded due to short muscles. Therefore, there is no reduction of space in the joint hip and lower back so the bones can move freely with no restriction. We are not born on a bike and you need to do some work on your body to achieve the range of motion for your sport, whether you're a professional, amateur or tourist. Even if you're 10 or 70 years old, you are never too young/old to learn to stretch, your body can change quicker than you think you just have to do it..... Here are some stretches that can help you achieve the right range of motion (just remember the rules mentioned at the start of the article)

Photo 1.3 a b c

a) Start on hands and knees,



1.3b

b) Push up and back through the palms of your hands. Try and push your heels towards the ground until you feel a stretch anywhere along the back line. Hold there and take 3 slow long breaths. Return to hand and knees.

c) Lie flat on the ground



1.3b

d) Keeping your hips and last rib on the ground, push up through the hands (if you have back pain, stop and contact your physio, massage therapist, osteopath etc., do not continue this back extension exercise). Hold for 3 long slow breaths and repeat the routine a-d four times. Do this every day.

A good stretch before and after riding see photo 1.4 a b



1.4a

a) pull your knee to a 90 degree angle at the hip. Hold your leg in this position through the full range of stretch.



1.4b

b) Extend your leg until you have a full stretch in the hamstring. Hold for 10 sec and then relax the leg. Repeat this extension action 4 times. On every stretch, try and increase the range of the stretch. Do this on left and right side.



1.5a

a) Place your right ankle on your left knee, the right hand goes in-between your legs, left hand on the outside of the left leg. Grab behind the knee, or if you are more flexible, grab the front of knee.



1.5b

b) Draw the left knee back until you feel a stretch in the right glut. Try to keep your right knee pointing outwards, do not allow knee to track inwards.

For after bike or every day (photo 1.5 b c)

a) Sit on the edge of a table, bend your knees and roll back



1.6a

b) Hold your right knee to your chest, extend the left leg and allow it to hang off table for 15 sec.



1.6b

c) Gently draw the left ankle inwards increasing the stretch in the hip flexor and quad, hold 5-10 sec, release 3 sec and repeat ankle draw-in 4 times.
Bend left knee, bring it to your chest and allow the right leg to hang off the table and repeat action.