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"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"

Good Posture when Cycling

Although summer is coming to a close, there are still many people riding their bicycles. In fact, some people might even say that fall is an even better time to go cycling because of the mild temperatures and beautiful fall colors throughout the Nicola Valley. Regardless of what season you prefer, there are a few simple facts I would like to share with when it comes to your posture and positioning while riding.

As I trotted along at the Terry Fox Run this weekend, I couldn't help but to notice how many children and adults were riding bicycles that did not have the seat height adjusted properly for their body height. If your seat is adjusted too low, your knees have to bend significantly more during the "upstroke" of each pedal rotation. Repetitive movements of the knee joint when it is at or near the fully bent position may result in pain and swelling in and around the knee. For example, if you had to squat down repetitively, it would be much less strenuous on your knee joints if you only had to bend them one-third of the way instead of two-thirds. Not only is having your seat adjusted improperly risky for your knees, but the muscles also have to work much harder to accomplish the same amount of work. For example, the muscles you use to stand up from a squatting position are at their greatest strength or "mechanical advantage" as your legs get closer to being straight. Although you do not want your leg to completely lock out straight during the end of the push or "down stroke" of pedaling, it should be pretty close. This allows your leg muscles to work efficiently, resulting in your ability to ride longer and harder. To summarize, adjust your seat height so that when your pedal is at its lowest level, your knee is just slightly bent.

Another important area of your bicycle that should be adjusted properly is the "stem" or "neck" of your handlebars. The height of this bar will determine how high your handlebars are from the ground. If it is too low, you will have to reach downward to grasp your handlebars. This will cause your back to bend forwards excessively and put you at risk of injuring the joints and/or muscles of the low back. As well, when you are forced to bend over too much while riding, you have to bend your neck backward excessively in order to see where you are going. This puts excessive stress on the muscles and joints of the neck,

eventually leading to potential neck pain and headaches. Most bicycles have a few inches of potential adjustment in the neck or stem. Make the appropriate changes so you do not have to reach below your hip level.

Now that you are familiar with how to adjust your bicycle properly, there is another important item that I should mention. When you are riding, keep a concave or “dish-shaped” curve in your low back. If your back is kept in this position, it will be able to handle longer rides without the pain and stiffness afterward.

In closing, don't forget to wear a helmet (after all, it is the law). They will help prevent neck and head injuries during those wipeouts that will inevitably occur.