



## Adapting to the Bike Saddle During the First Rides: Pelvic Floor Considerations

I'm writing a few lines on a topic that is often overlooked at the start of the cycling season. Discussing the "protection of the lower back" in relation to the bike saddle is perhaps one of the most important aspects for many aspiring cyclists who are getting back into riding.

As with any sport, even when it comes to the "rear end," it's important to be gradual and start with short rides, both in terms of distance and time spent sitting.

I was a spin biker in the gym for almost two decades, and back then, I never imagined writing an article about the bike saddle because I was constantly "trained" in this aspect, thanks to the numerous weekly spin bike classes. Consequently, the problem never arose! So, when summer came and it was time to ride a real bike outdoors, my lower back never had any issues.

Today, however, despite being trained in endurance thanks to walking, I'm no longer used to sitting on a bike saddle! This means that in the two months (July and August) when I dedicate myself to bike rides, I have to start cautiously, opting for very short routes. This choice is not because my legs can't handle long rides, as I feel that even in the early stages on the bike, I could cover many kilometers; the limiting factor is the time spent sitting on the saddle. Therefore, the first week is dedicated to this aspect with short rides. But let's take a closer look... Especially if you are a person with a large physique and a body weight over 85-90 kg (my case) for men and over 60-65 kg for women, the guidelines for the saddle during the first bike rides become essential. The load of body weight resting on a small surface like the saddle can, over time, damage the pelvic floor. Now that I am close to graduating in my osteopathic training, I have learned that the pelvic floor muscles play a truly fundamental role in bodily health for many reasons. In fact, the pelvic diaphragm not only has an organic/visceral support function but is also crucial for the passage of various vascular and nerve structures. The pressure exerted by the saddle surface, combined with the user's body weight, can cause compression damage that, if repeated over time, can lead to chronic fixations in this area of the body.

Starting the season gradually allows for adaptations that, once completed, will enable longer rides to be undertaken safely and without risks to the pelvic muscles. Therefore, a brief transition is necessary before

really starting with more demanding rides!

A first phase to support the pelvic structure is to always focus on the "lower abdomen posture." In fact, adopting an abdominal control attitude while pedaling, aimed at the so-called "flat stomach," allows for an upward push of the entire organic/visceral component, counteracting the inexorable effect of "gravitational fall" of the internal structures and providing tone to the pelvic floor in response to the contact force exerted by the saddle on this area. This is particularly important for people over 55 years old, as organic ptosis due to gravitational factors may have taken over, with a downward aggravation. As already mentioned, during the first rides, it is advisable not to overdo it, taking care to focus on the retraction of the lower abdomen to achieve an upward push of the viscera and, consequently, good tone of the pelvic muscles, in opposition to the support on a small surface like the saddle. It is recommended to start with a short ride of 8-10 kilometers at a moderate speed, then move on, after a couple of days, to a new route of 10-12 kilometers and continue with a subsequent training of 15-18 kilometers. This is for the first week.

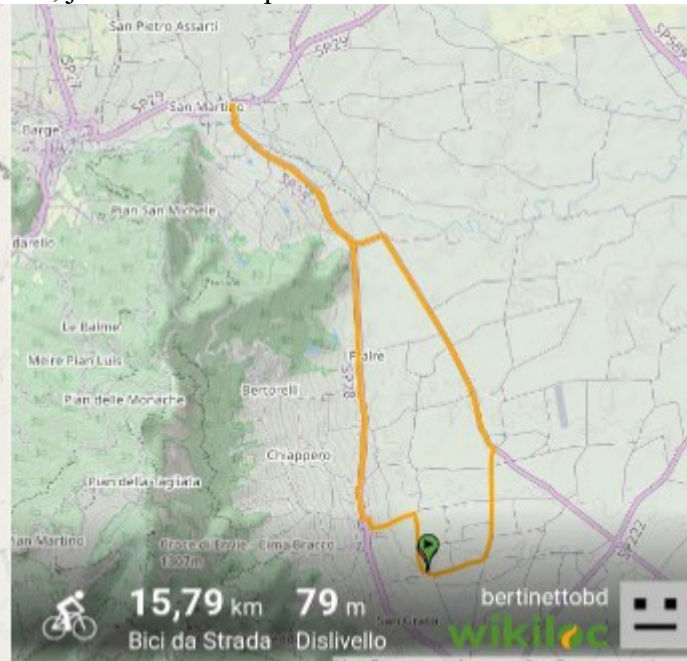
I am a fan of Monoallenamento (<http://www.bertinettobartolomeodavide.it/ultratrail/index.html>) even for bike rides, with rides consisting of very long routes for a single outing per week. However, to achieve this result, it is good to start the season gradually and dedicate at least one week to 3-4 short rides to "prepare the lower back" for the saddle. Once this is done, it will then be possible to proceed with the next part, consisting of single weekly bike rides for subsequent impressive distances... However, this article is not aimed at managing simple lower back pain but at the subsequent complications resulting from a pelvic floor "unprepared" to support the body's gravitational load by the muscles of that compartment (ischiococcygeus, levator ani, pubococcygeus, puborectalis, iliococcygeus) in relation to the support on the bike saddle.

However, after the first short bike rides, it will be good to continue with the training, planning a sequence of stretching exercises aimed at freeing the structures in restriction induced by prolonged support on the saddle. That said, do not go straight to the shower, but get a fitness mat for some muscle stretching exercises. There is a lot of talk about stretching after training, but not everyone is willing to do it. Eliminating the hypertonicity caused by training on some muscles in the pelvic diaphragm area will eliminate the risk of chronic fixations that inhibit fundamental structures from a visceral, circulatory, and nervous point of view. However, such exercises will be the subject of a subsequent article, so I will not discuss them here... Further precautions are also appropriate, especially for male cyclists over 55 years old, related to the protection of prostatic hypertrophy (physiological after this age) and the protection of any hemorrhoidal processes (a problem rarely admitted and hardly declared, but present in at least 50% of the Western population), with the use of centrally divided saddles or gel saddle covers. Preventive measures are also useful for people who do not suffer from any type of problem.

Below, I add two maps related to two small loops completed in this July 2024 in my area, just as an example:



First Ride July 2024 – 9.27km Loop



Second Ride July 2024 – 15.79km Loop

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