

Easing into Indoors

Avoiding
Off-Season
Injuries

by Dr. Jenn Turner

With winter upon us and less than stellar weather across the country, it's time to resort to alternative means to log your miles on the bike. This can include rollers, stationary trainers or spin classes, and all are great ways to maintain fitness and improve technique during the off season.

Like any other repetitive activity, though, spinning and other types of indoor training can also lead to the development of various injuries. Knees, hips and backs seem to be the areas that are most susceptible, due to the high repetitions and the vigorous, fast-paced pedalling that your body may not be used to. Be sure to mix up your winter cardio workouts, and remember, don't overdo it in the off season. It is tempting to train hard all winter in preparation for next season, but you need to give your body a break from the overload you incur during the actual season. Deal with muscle imbalances by doing some snowshoeing or cross-country skiing. It is a good idea to find a good strength and conditioning coach to work on developing strength in the off season. Many pro triathletes make strength training a key part of their winter training.

Just like on your race bike, a spin bike must be fit as accurately as possible. A poor fit causes certain muscle groups to over-work, or puts abnormal stresses on certain joints. The best way to fit a stationary or spin bike is to adjust the seat so when your foot is at the bottom position of the pedal stroke, there is a slight bend in the knee. The seat should also be forward enough so that the knee comes over the centre of the pedal. You should not feel too much strain on your wrists or neck, and pedalling should be comfortable and smooth.

Back injuries are a common ailment suffered from spinning. Spinning usually encourages high cadences, much higher than we would ever do out on the road. This is great for leg speed, but if the athlete has a

core stability issue, or excessive movement side to side (or rocking – typically a result of a saddle being too high), a back injury may ensue. Muscle imbalances and poor bike fit are also a common cause of back pain. Riding with a curved back puts a lot of stress through the ligaments of the back and is caused by poor bike fit or tight hamstrings. Excessively tight hip flexors can create a weakness in the glutes, which can also stress the tissues of the back, resulting in pain. The off season is a great time to work on cycling technique and posture. Another common injury from indoor cycling is wrist strain. That's because more strain is placed on the wrists because of the position and fit of many spin bikes.

On the trainer or rollers, athletes tend to put more weight through their arms than when riding outside. This can cause strain to the ligaments and tendons in the wrist, but can also cause compression of the ulnar nerve, called Cyclist's Palsy. Symptoms of this condition include a numbness and tingling, or weakness and clumsiness of the hand and thumb.

All of these injuries can be avoided with proper off-season balance and training. Off-season training should be focused to build on your weaknesses and make you stronger, more balanced and prepare you to be even more fit for the next season. **T**

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