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Stretching Your Back



“You need to incorporate some stretching into your fitness routine, so I glued all of your snacks to the ceiling!”

How to Stretch Your Back—And Why It’s Important for Cyclists to Do So

PLUS, EIGHT EXPERT-RECOMMENDED STRETCHES TO ADD TO YOUR POSTRIDE COOLDOWN.

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You crushed today’s ride and hop off the saddle feeling strong. You know you should probably do some [stretches](#), but you’re strapped for time and they’re not *that* essential, right? Your brain may agree, but trust us, your body—and your back in particular—would say otherwise.

“Back stretching for cyclists is very important,” Chicago-based physical therapist [Paul Schroeder](#), P.T., M.P.T., C.S.C.S., spokesperson for the American Physical Therapy Association and owner of [Fast Track Physio](#), tells *Bicycling*.

Not only can regularly stretching your back alleviate chronic tightness, it can also help you [ride stronger](#) and longer while reducing your risk of injury. Ahead, we explain why cyclists should make back stretches a part of their regular [postride routine](#), as well as how to stretch your back with eight awesome moves that get the job done.

Why Every Cyclist Should Stretch Their Back

More than half of cyclists suffer from [low back pain](#), according to a 2017 review published in the journal [Sports Health](#). And while [back pain](#) can be caused by a variety of factors, the simple act of cycling can do a number on this muscle group.

Specifically, the hunched-forward [posture](#) that we hold while riding can place a lot of strain on the low and mid back, [Scott Cheatham](#), P.T., Ph.D., D.P.T., managing board member of the National Academy of Sports Medicine scientific advisory board and Torrence, California-based sports physical therapist, tells *Bicycling*.

Additionally, cycling can fatigue and thus tighten lower-body muscles, like your [hamstrings](#), [hip flexors](#), and [quads](#). When those key players are stiff, they pull on your pelvis, altering its position by tilting it forward or backward, explains Schroeder. Then, because the low back is connected to the [pelvis](#), that altered positioning can strain the low back. Ultimately, this triggers tightness that extends from the low back all the way up to the [neck](#), says Schroeder.

The good news: In many cases, regular back stretching can help reduce some of this stiffness and allow you to feel more comfortable as you ride, says Cheatham. It can also improve your range of motion, boost performance, and [reduce your risk of injury](#) while decreasing muscle tension and [cramping](#), says Schroeder.

8 Back Stretches for Cyclists

Do the following stretches, recommended by Schroeder, after every ride. If you don't have time for all eight, then do six, choosing between the prone press-up or standing backbend, and the upper trunk rotation or all-fours T-spine rotation, in addition to doing the other four moves. You can also do three of the below stretches—the cat-camel, lower-trunk rotation, and supine figure-four—before your ride as part of a broader [dynamic warmup](#), says Schroeder.

Keep in mind: The following list doesn't constitute a full-body post-ride [stretching routine](#). In addition to these moves, you'd also want to incorporate exercises that stretch your [calves](#), [neck](#), upper traps, [shoulders](#), and [chest muscles](#), says Schroeder.

You may also consider [foam rolling](#) after your ride, says Cheatham, which in the case of your back, would include rolling your mid back, lats (the big muscles of the back), and teres major (which extends from the scapula to the arm bone).

However you incorporate these moves into your routine, know that stretching “should be pain-free,” says Cheatham. You may feel slight discomfort, which is okay, but if it veers into the category of [pain](#), ease up on the stretch. If you ease up and *still* feel pain, then stop the stretch entirely, he says. Schroeder recommends [stretching](#) until you feel a moderate pull in your muscle—hold there without going deeper.

Lastly, if you have a medical condition or history of injury, chat with a healthcare provider first before trying new stretches. They can advise whether certain moves are recommended for you.

1. Quad Couch Stretch



Get into a kneeling lunge position with right knee on the ground and left foot forward with left knee bent at 90 degrees. Place right foot on a chair, couch, bench, or against a wall. Maintaining a neutral spine, engage core, keep back straight, and gently lean trunk forward and tuck pelvis slightly forward until you feel a moderate stretch in front of right thigh. Hold for 30 seconds. Repeat on the other side. Do 3 reps of 30 seconds on each side, alternating sides.

2. Supine Figure-Four Stretch



Lie faceup with knees bent. Place right ankle on left knee. Clasp hands together behind left thigh and gently pull that knee into chest. Pause when you feel a moderate stretch sensation in right hip. Hold for 30 seconds. Repeat on the other side. Do 3 reps of 30 seconds on each side, alternating sides.

3. Lower Trunk Rotation



Lie faceup with knees bent and over hips, arms straight out to the side, at shoulder height. Let knees fall to the left, without moving arms. You should feel a stretch in the right side of low back. Hold for 10 seconds, return to center, then let knees fall to the right. You should feel a stretch in the left side of low back. Hold for another 10 seconds. Continue this pattern for 3-5 total reps on each side. For a deeper stretch, place right ankle on top of left knee and let left knee fall as far as possible towards the right. Stop when you feel a stretch in the left side of low back. Repeat on the other side.

4. Cat Camel (Cat Cow)

Start on all fours with wrists under shoulders, knees under hips. Round midback while curling upper and lower segment of spine downward. Look toward belly button. This is cat position. Hold for 5 seconds, then reverse the motion so that midback drops toward the ground, low back arches, and look toward ceiling. This is camel (or cow) position. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat this pattern, alternating positions, for 5 total rounds.

5. Upper Trunk Rotation

Lie on right side with hips flexed to 90 degrees, hips and knees stacked. Extend arms straight out to the side, palms together. This is the starting position. Inhale, then as you exhale, raise top arm up towards the ceiling and over to right side as far as possible. Follow right arm with eyes and head while keeping left arm grounded and legs in starting position. Hold for 10 seconds, then return to the starting position. Repeat. Do 5 reps. Then switch sides.

6. Prone Press-Up

Lie facedown with stomach on the ground, hands directly under shoulders. This is your starting position. Keeping low back relaxed, take a deep inhale, then exhale slowly as you press up

through hands and bend backwards as far as you can. You should feel a stretch in low back; hold for a few seconds, then slowly lower back to starting position. Repeat for 10 total reps. Keep low back relaxed the entire time.

7. Standing Back Bend

Stand tall and place fists on low back, right above waistline. This is the starting position. Inhale and as you exhale, bend back against fists as far you can, avoiding any pain or pinching. You should feel a stretch in low back. Hold for a few seconds, then slowly return to starting position. Repeat. Do 10 reps.

8. Quadruped T-Spine Rotation

Start on all fours, shoulders over wrists and knees under hips. Lower forearms to the ground. Gently rest right hand on the back of head. Right elbow should be pointing toward floor; left forearm on the ground. This is the starting position. Inhale, then as you exhale, drive left forearm into the ground while rotating right elbow up to the ceiling. Hold at the top for 5 seconds, then return to the starting position. Repeat. Do 5 reps. Then switch sides.

Okay riders, we crossed the finish line again. That's all for now.

Until next time,

Make Every Ride Epic,
Darryl