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## **ARTICLE – WHY ARE THERE SO MANY FAT CYCLISTS?!**

When composing this article – there was an inner struggle between being politically correct and use terms like overweight, under thin, size inappropriate etc – but sadly the message intended for those who can make a difference would probably go unheeded as it would be white washed in the effort to play down the effects of this article.

Not so. The use of the word Fat was deliberately chosen because in reality if you ride then you should not have this problem.

Therefore – why are there so many fat cyclists?

These are the reasons that I have gleaned after years of clinical observation, discussions and treatment of many cyclists. Many of the facts will be blunt but it can make a BIG difference in the long term to your health and your wellness on the Bike

1. You consume more than what you burn.

If you are in your 30s and beyond in age and eating the same amount and pace that you did when you were in your teens, you are already behind the eight ball.

Too many adults eat far too much food almost as if there were previously at the point of starvation. If you consume a meal and eat to the point of feeling comfortable, this is good BUT if you eat till you feel bloated and stretched, then it is obvious that your stomach muscles will do just that.

Sadly also cyclists tend to think that because they ride – that they can eat more! This is far from the truth as your body will consume what it needs and the rest is either rejected or if your eat patterns are inconsistent and poor, then more than likely the body will convert the excess food to storage fat for that 'rainy day'.



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It is far better to consume food on a regular and controlled manner over the course of the day because the swaying between binge eating after a big ride and starving oneself after an guilt ridden excessive meal also means the same thing.

It is all about self control.

## 2. Power to Weight Ratio

Every keen motor vehicle driver will know the difference between kW and weight ratio – that is the power that their car produces compared to its weight.

For example if a car produced 150 kW of power but was 2 tonnes in weight, it would be obvious to everyone that another vehicle at 120 kW power to 1.2 tonnes of weight will probably out pull and accelerate the latter vehicle.

The same applies to the principle of cycling EXCEPT most cyclists who put on weight fail to realise that THEY are the link between Power to Weight and instead blame the bike for their shortcomings when it comes to accelerating from stand still and also in cycling tasks such as Hill Climbs and Standing Hill Climbs.

Lose weight and lose it properly and your Power to Weight Ratio on the bike will improve and so will your ability to climb and sustain long distances on the bike. You will even save money on unnecessary bike purchases and changing of components to make your bike 'lighter'!

## 3. Change your Riding Patterns every 3 months

If you are riding the same route every day, every week and every month and wonder why you are losing muscle tone and turning flabby, it might just be because the body has reached a level of conditioning where it is comfortable with the routine.

It is said that we have to vary our cycling routes, provide variation in the types of rides that we undertake and very importantly, ALL cyclists must cross train. No shortcuts and no excuses.



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If you are one of those cyclist preparing for a long ride with one of those extremely long charity rides, one of those doing the iconic 3 and 5 Dams challenge or contemplating doing longer serious recreational cycling of more than 100 km per ride – then you need to seriously heed these pointers:

- a. Vary your bunch ride duration, distance and route EVERY week;
- b. You need to have a develop cross training program that suits your body type – noting that not all cross training programs should be the same for everyone despite the provision of generalised programs out there;
- c. You need to hydrate consistently and constantly as your body needs the water (and I am not referring to the preservative filled gels either) for temperature regulation and lubrication of the muscles.
- d. Undertake a proper indoor cycling training program. All of the professionals undertake up to 30-35% of their programs on a wind trainer / stationery bike which is properly set up and or properly set up– why don't you?

Bunch Ride leaders have a ethical responsibility to ensure they provide variation and alternatives to their rides for all of the reasons I have prescribed above.

In summary just riding and riding long distances without any proper training methods is therefore insufficient and potentially the cause for cycling related injuries.

#### 4. Alcohol & Sugar Filled Drinks

Alcohol is the ruin of many cyclists who have become fat. They complete a long exhausting ride and are parched by the time they arrive at their destination and the first thing they reach out for is an alcoholic drink! Talk about destroying all of the benefits of the ride you just completed.

This is itself the wrong way to ride BECAUSE if you feel thirsty on the ride then you are already dehydrated and your water consumption during the ride is probably inadequate.



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When you are thirsty, your stomach also reads the signals wrongly and assumes for you that you are hungry! The result – the non discerning cyclist ends up trying to get more sugar into their body and wrongly assumes that that cool sweet drink will be a good quick replacement.

It is also said that many cyclists carry a ‘beer gut’ and this is exactly what happens with excessive alcohol where the synthesis of this alcohol is not complete and is assimilated into fat by the body who is convinced that you are hungry!

Sugar filled drinks and worse still drinks filled with artificial sweeteners give you a quick blood sugar high and then bring you a prolonged low in due course. Cyclists refer to this sometimes as the ‘bonk’ and all they do is then wrongly reload themselves up with more sugar and processed food.

Each person is different and how your body assimilates and processes food is very specific to each person and a proper fitness and physiological assessment can assist in this regard.

#### 5. Development of abdominal muscles and core strength

The term core strength is banded around a lot yet many cyclists don’t realise the implications of why they need core strength. Your back muscles which support your frame on the bike frame also needs to have opposing supportive muscles. These opposing supportive muscles are your abdominal muscles which explains why cyclists with fat stomachs are consistently plagued by low back pain even if they ride constantly.

The ability of the hips and the legs – otherwise known as your crank shaft –akin to the engine of a motor vehicle is invariably linked through the iliopsoas muscles with attachments near the abdominal region and the lower back. The stronger and firmer you are in these areas – the better you are on the bike.

I have already mentioned the need for Cross Training. I employ a range of programs all of which is individualised for the needs of the cyclists. We have introduced ergonomic specific stationery cycling with controlled measures and



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methods and even to creating a cross training program which sees cyclists ride and do circuit based programs with our Exercise Physiology team.

We recently ran the inaugural one with great success and feedback from the participants.

At the end of the day, most cross training program should be targeted at other muscle groups that are utilised less than the ones used for cycling. That said, cyclists with underlying clinical issues that they are dealing with should also take heed to the areas where they have inherent biomechanical and neuromuscular issues before they head out there and do a self created cross training program.

## 6. You Are What You Eat!

In the beginning of the article it was stated that consuming excessive amount of food is detrimental – the same also applies to the type and quality of food that you eat.

There is enough clinical evidence about the lack of virtues of fried food, fast food, processed food and food which is genetically modified. A separate article on this subject matter alone will probably take a whole book. Why then are so many cyclists eating processed gels, bars and products that have shelf lives of months and years? What happened to the good ole fashion goodness home cooked meals before and after the ride?

Most Cyclists already know the types of natural and good food that gives them energy and the types that deplete their energy. Those accustomed to races, long distance rides, Audax, Cyclosporifs etc normally have their own 'secret' formula of what to eat before, during and after these events.

If your secret formula involves all of the negatives that I mentioned above, you may wish to measure you waist and ask yourself – why you are growing a 'gut' when you are cycling?



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## 7. Ergonomic Position

Just stand by the side of a popular bike pathway or route and observe the number of fat cyclists and how they are set up on their bike.

If I was a betting person I would probably say that many of them would have poor or incorrect ergonomic positions that result in unequal biomechanical forces on the body which in turn affect how the muscles function with each other.

These biomechanical imbalances not only produce long term neuromuscular or musculoskeletal problems – they also affect muscle tone and affects the balance of muscles, with the abdominal muscles normally suffering in the process because of the fact that the positioning on the bike lends itself towards gravity.

Considerations for proper bike set ups should start ethically from Bike Shops and those with persistent biomechanical, neuromuscular and or musculoskeletal complaints should seek a proper Bike Ergonomics assessment from a qualified health professional who is also a cyclist.

### **What Are The Solutions?**

At this point in time you will be asking, so with all of this information of don'ts what is the advice and directions that one can take:

1. Get a proper cycling related Fitness Assessment.

Perth Integrated Health has a comprehensive cycling related fitness assessment which involves all major measurements including use of thermal scanners, medical Ergometer and involvement of an Exercise Physiologist and Biomechanical Practitioner. If you wish to learn more email Julian Mancini, Senior Consultant, Exercise Physiologist for the required forms. Email: [julian@pihc.com.au](mailto:julian@pihc.com.au)



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## 2. Get a proper Bike Ergonomic Assessment.

If your bike set up is creating problems with your biomechanical positions and indirectly affecting your body look no further than PIHCG's iconic Bike Ergonomics Assessment conducted by Ian Wee, Bike Ergonomist. If you wish to know more about this our information and forms are available on line at:

[www.pihc.com.au/cycling](http://www.pihc.com.au/cycling)

## 3. Strength Training and Cross Training

As indicated this may require for most cyclists an individualised fitness assessment program or neuromuscular assessment.

Practitioners at Perth Integrated Health who are themselves cyclists can do this for you or you can check out our numerous strength training programs on [www.pihc.com.au](http://www.pihc.com.au)

The next series commences next week in two locations; north of river in Inglewood and south of river in Melville. These courses have been created by PIH practitioners in concert with our specially trained indoor cycling coaches.

## 4. Coaching

Let's face it – if cyclists understood the proper methods of cycling and techniques associated it with – they will probably be better balanced in their physiology as well as in their fitness and skills level.

PIHCG offers year round courses on Cycling Training with our 2012 calendar of training already made public. For these 10 week courses which will produce better and fitter cyclists email our PIHCG Admin Officer: [inez@pihc.com.au](mailto:inez@pihc.com.au)

Individuals wishing to have personalised programs to cater for their fitness needs are to email PIHCG Director Sportif at: [cycling@pihc.com.au](mailto:cycling@pihc.com.au) and we will fit a suitable cycling coach to your specific needs.



## 5. Nutritional Advice

Many people struggle with this aspect of weight loss and fat control. PIHCG conducts regular community based educational programs on Performance Enhancement and Nutrition for cyclists.

Our next workshop is scheduled for the 8 Nov 2011 and we only have 10 places left. If keen to attend this early morning workshop email [inez@pihc.com.au](mailto:inez@pihc.com.au) .

This workshop will be held at PIH Northern Districts on Tuesday 8 Nov 2011 at 615 am to 715 am and attendance is via confirmed appointment only. FOC to cyclists.

If you can't make it or the quota is filled, leave your expression of interest to attend the next workshop and if we have 20 people on the books we will host another such community based workshop for cyclists.

## 6. Bunch Rides

If your Bunch Rides are all about the egos of a few and are repetitive, boring and predictable with issues of safety – DUMP THEM and apply with us for our regulated and innovative PIHCG Bunch Ride programs with 8 to choose from every week ranging from social bunch rides, to experienced bunch rides , ladies bunch rides and hills rides. Most of our bunch rides are taken by PIHCG nationally qualified coaches who also incorporate aspects of cycling training and techniques in every week's ride as well as variation in course, distance and location as mentioned in the article

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For information on PIHCG's Bunch Ride program email PIHCG Admin Officer Inez: [inez@pihc.com.au](mailto:inez@pihc.com.au)

Note that our Bunch Rides are by invitation only and we reserve the right to choose the right type of attitude and character of cyclists that ride with us.

All further queries or comments about this article please direct them to the author Ian Wee: [ianwee@pihc.com.au](mailto:ianwee@pihc.com.au)

*Ian Wee is a biomechanical and neuromuscular based occupational therapist as well as Principal at Perth Integrated Health. He is also Director Sportif for the Perth Integrated Health Cycling Group, a qualified cycle skills coach as well as an Aust Cycle national accredited teacher. Ian presents regularly in public and corporate health forums on cycling and health with specific topics such as Biomechanics, Performance, Nutrition and Fitness and is also a nationally qualified Medical Classifier for Cycling Australia and the Australian Paralympics Committee. Ian was nominated as a finalist in the professional category in 2011 for his contribution to cycling in the national Bicycle Achievement Award and has recently published two medical articles on cycling at the National Sports Medicine Australia conference.*

**DISCLAIMER:** This article has been based on clinical observations, discussions and clinical reviews of many patients who are cyclists and also experience gleaned over the years from coaching and clinical research. It does not intend or purport to portray an individual or individuals as it has been written with the cycling public in general and any references that may seem specific to anyone is purely coincidental.

Next Article: Are You Really Using The Correct Components on Your Bike?



**Perth Integrated Health Cycling Group**