

ROCK MY MEN♀PAUSE

What even your best friend won't tell you about CYCLING AND THE MENOPAUSE

There are many women who can't cycle anymore because of how menopause makes them feel when they sit on the saddle. But you don't have to give up your favourite hobby.

Words by Dr. Jane Davis

I know women who are giving up cycling because they are too sore to sit on a saddle.

I know women are not talking about this with each other. Even their best friends.

This makes me sad and angry.

So, let's get this subject out in the open.

Why is this happening?

Cycling puts a lot of pressure on the vulva. By 'vulva' I mean the lips, the vaginal opening, clitoris and where your wee comes out. Please feel free to replace 'vulva' with your euphemism of choice.

The menopause brings thinning of the vulval and vaginal skin. This delicate area loses its smoothness, plumpness, elasticity and natural lubrication.

This happens to everyone during menopause, but some people feel the effects more than others.

So, take a delicate, dry unprotected area and subject it to sweat, heat, pressure and friction from a saddle and what do you get? Ouch, ouch, ouch!

It goes like this:

Women are feeling itching and prickling when they sit on a saddle. They get soreness when they're cycling. They feel pain or discomfort for days afterwards. They dread a long ride due to the fear of how they will feel afterwards. Sex is avoided. The cycling dwindles. The hobby is lost, and along with it, friends, fitness and wellbeing.

1



Go commando!

This is so, so, so, important. First golden rule – go commando! Underwear under cycle gear is a one-way trip to chaffing, soreness and tears. Dispense with the knickers, lash on some barrier cream and off you go.

2



Good vulval skin care

Take as much care, if not more, of your vulval skin as you would your face. Avoid soaps, perfumes and irritants. Wash with a moisturiser; you don't need bubbles. Pat dry and gently apply more moisturiser. For some brilliant information, check out this advice from the British Association of Dermatologists.

<http://www.bad.org.uk/shared/get-file.ashx?id=74&itemtype=document>

3



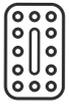
Use a moisturiser and a barrier cream

Vulval moisturising ointments are available on prescription, online, or over the counter. Some can also be used as reasonable barrier creams, but can leave an oily residue and are also flammable, so beware! Baby nappy cream is cheap and cheerful. Cycle chamois creams are also available.

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Rock My Menopause is a campaign of the Primary Care Women's Health Forum, a group of 10,000 healthcare professionals with a special interest in women's health. We aim to equip people with the information and support they need to become more menopause aware.

4



Consider using vaginal oestrogen

The root of the problem is thin, delicate skin because of lack of oestrogen. If you want to reverse this change, seriously think about asking for a prescription for vaginal oestrogen. It is agreed to be safe for so many women, that vaginal oestrogen is available directly from pharmacies in other countries. It comes in the form of cream, vaginal tablets or a soft vaginal ring. The added benefit of any of these may be better, more comfortable sex – what's not to like about that?

5



Get decent cycle wear with a wide-padded gusset

It's really worth investing in cycle tights or shorts with a well-padded seam free gusset. You'll be very glad you did!

6



Get a 'woman-specific' saddle

Saddles with grooves are especially designed help avoid trapping or squashing of the lips. Gel saddles can work well, and some cycle specialists will fit you a bespoke saddle moulded to your specific shape.

7



Good hygiene

As soon as your ride is over, hit the shower, and put your cycle gear in the washing machine. Fungus and bacteria adore those warm, damp areas. You'll avoid infections if you do this.

8



If you're doing all this and you're still sore

On a doctorly note - please see someone medical about it. There can be other skin conditions which can be part of the problem, such as eczema, lichen sclerosus or rarely, cancers. Most GPs are good at this kind of thing, or could refer you to a specialist vulval skin clinic if needed. Alternatively, if you'd rather tackle your vulval health more secretly, with people who are very comfortable with talking genitals, your local genitourinary (GU) or menopause clinic will have the expertise you need.



*Your best friend won't tell you, but I will. Look after your vulva.
Get comfortable again and get back on that saddle, girl!*

If this has helped you, please pass the message along.