

# *Surviving Cyclefest*

## Sage Advice from a Licensed Physical Therapist

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If you plan to ride in the 2015 Gulf Coast Cyclefest for the first time or are considering doing a longer distance than normal, you may want to consider the following suggestions to help make the ride easier, safer and more enjoyable.

### *You and Your Bike Should be a Perfect Couple*

First, make sure your bike fits properly. Sitting on a bike for any length of time stresses the body; being on one that is not properly aligned makes matters worse. A professional fitting, while a bit expensive (\$250), can be very helpful, especially if you have physical limitations.

### *Tune Up Your Bike*

No one wants to be riding and have their chain, a spoke or a cable break or have any other mechanical problem that could have been prevented. All bicycle shops can do a thorough inspection and correct any issues or problems. Do this weeks in advance of the ride to ensure the problems are resolved.

### *Choose an Appropriate Distance*

Choose the distance you plan to ride and prepare for it in advance. For example, if you plan to ride a century and the longest ride you have done this season is only 30-40 miles, it is going to be a long and painful Cyclefest ride. You should be able to comfortably ride at the speed you want for at least three-fourths of the intended Cyclefest distance. Be realistic about the distance and pace. Ride with people with similar abilities. If riding alone try to hook up with others going the pace with which you are comfortable.

### *Ride at a Comfortable Pace*

Remember, the mind or ego will dictate to the legs just how hard and fast you can pedal. Don't let your ego push you beyond your capacity in an effort to either keep up with someone or to attempt a pace that is uncomfortable. The legs are the driving force and the heart will respond to what the legs are doing. Warm up prior to starting the ride and accelerate gradually to your cruising speed. Not doing this increases the chances of a pulled muscle. The heart is a very sophisticated muscle and stressing it more than it is capable of can result in significant damage.

## ***Focus for a Safe Ride***

Whether riding along or with a group, always observe the rules of the road. Use right, left, slowing and stopping hand signals for the other riders and traffic. Stay to the right side of the road unless passing and announce “on your left” before you pass, keeping a 3-foot distance between you and the other riders. If in a group, pay close attention to what you are doing and verbally alert others when there is a “car up”, “car back” or debris in the path. Don’t ride in a pace line if you are not familiar with that style of riding. If it is a pace line then remember to take your turn up front even if it is only for a short while.

## ***Managing Rest Stops***

Keep your rest stops as short as possible. The longer you spend resting, the more difficult it is to get started again as the body cools down, thinking it is done or in rest mode. Be careful when choosing food and liquids at a rest stop. Try to use only those items which you have used in the past without having problems. You don't want to have to ride with an upset stomach or irritable bowel. Don't overeat. There is a great reward lunch waiting for you at the end. Stop between the official rest stops if they are too far apart.

## ***Stretching***

The act of riding a bike is a simple one but it requires more or less a constant posture. Learn to stretch both off and on the bike, but not while in a pace line. Start with the head and neck and work down the body. Varying hand positions will reduce the likelihood of irritating the nerves that cause tingling in the hands. Standing or just getting off the saddle reduces the likelihood of placing pressure on the nerves that innervate the groin area. Prevent numbness in this area by rising off the saddle once every 15 or 20 minutes. Stretching helps prevent cramping due to overuse, especially in the thighs and calves. Calf stretching is easily done on the bike. Stand up and bring one foot down to the 6 o'clock position. Then drop the lower heel as far as possible and hold that position 10-30 seconds. Repeat with the other leg. Quad stretching is best done off the bike. While standing using your hand, hold one heel as close to your buttocks as possible and hold for 30 seconds. Repeat with other leg. Stretching post ride is the most effective and will help the body to relax. Here is a link to [7 Simple Stretches for Cyclists](#).

## ***Fuel & Hydration***

Hot, humid days make it more difficult for the rider to dispel heat. Wear clothes that are appropriate for the weather and that wick moisture away from the body. Drinking enough fluid along the ride will also be somewhat dictated by the weather. If the day is hot and humid consume more fluids. What you drink is entirely up to you as long as you are used to that fluid. Experimenting with unknown drinks can cause gastric problems. On most rides water alone will do but consuming sports drinks is okay and may give added benefit. Sometimes a rider reaches a point where the body says it is time to stop but the ego doesn't want to admit they cannot finish. Listen to your body. Stop, get off the bike and rest in the shade for a few minutes. If you continue to feel very weak, dizzy or light-headed you may have bonked—call for a sag wagon, the phone number is on you wrist band.

## ***Enjoy the Ride***

Lastly, remember that Cyclefest is not a race! Take time to enjoy the scenery; talk to your fellow riders and relax. Stop as often as you need, don't wait for a SAG stop. Don't make the ride an arduous trek but rather a fun and enjoyable time. If there is any doubt as to whether you can do any of the Cyclefest rides, please consult your physician in advance.