A Women-Only Guide to You and Your Bike

by Molly Hurford
This book is dedicated to my amazing friends and family who have helped me with my career in cycling in so many ways.

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More Information:
saddlesorewomen.com
Welcome to the mini version of Saddle, Sore. When I started writing this book, a big part of the reason was because I know how hard it is being a young junior just starting out in cycling—and how much harder it is as a girl with no one to talk to about your personal questions! Asking my dad about pads versus tampons was out of the question, and I had no idea who to talk to about my cycling shorts, or why my underwear was bunching in them (oops!). It was a steep learning curve, and every pro woman that I speak to says the exact same thing.

So this is the condensed version of Saddle, Sore, designed to help you a bit along the way. Check out the full version (see saddlesorewomen.com for details) to answer more of your questions and to get into greater detail, and check out the website SaddleSoreWomen.com for even more answers.

Happy riding!

-Molly Hurford
If you were on a ride and sprained your ankle, would you say something to the group you were riding with? Obviously, you wouldn’t just suffer in silence. But what about when you’re out on a ride, and you realize that you’re cramping terribly because you’re just about to get your period? Or you start feeling tingly, or numb, on the saddle? Most women won’t speak up. Most will suffer in silence, come home, and have no idea why they have massive saddle sores—if they even realize what a saddle sore looks like—or how to treat it.

Your level of experience doesn’t matter. I know women from beginners to pros who have questions about their bodies that they aren’t comfortable asking bike shop employees, coaches, or even their gynecologists. We’ve been conditioned to not talk about our “lady parts,” and that touchiness is hurting the female cyclist population, and making riding a whole lot less fun.

Riding shouldn’t be uncomfortable. You shouldn’t be getting saddle sores every ride. Your clitoris shouldn’t feel numb. Cramping shouldn’t be making you cry on the bike. And you shouldn’t be wearing your underwear with your bike shorts.

“A lot of women don’t even know not to wear underwear. They’re like, ‘I’m getting this horrible rash where my underwear is,’ and I’m like, ‘Whoa!’” bike shop manager Samantha Stumpf laughs as we start chatting. It sounds funny, but all too familiar, and it makes me wonder how many women quit cycling because it’s uncomfortable—not because it really is uncomfortable, but because they’re missing some basic information.

When I first started riding a bike, I had no idea what a chamois was. I
had no idea you shouldn’t wear underwear with it. And when I got a saddle sore, I freaked out a teensy bit. But what I didn’t do was talk to anyone about it. Sure, I’d have my yearly visit to the gynecologist. But if you think I was going to sit down and try to have a real discussion about the state of my ... ahem ... lady parts, well, you are sorely mistaken. For someone as loud-mouthed as I am, I shut up quick when faced with talking about my *whisper* vagina.

Well, not anymore. Too long have women suffered, faced with awkward questions like, “How do I deal with this saddle sore?” In fact, why aren’t women asking, “How can I prevent saddle sores?”

Because no one likes to talk about vaginas, that’s why. Because it’s awkward, messy, and occasionally hilarious. For me, working in a male-dominated industry, it just feels taboo to mention that I’m having some “female issues” on a ride. Or after a ride. Or right before a ride.

As one of the wonderful women interviewed for this book, Beth Leibo, put it, we need to “Make women feel like it’s OK to say they’re uncomfortable, because they are uncomfortable! We’re riding on the most sensitive part of our bodies.”

This is a short guide to being female cyclist, and to asking the weird questions. Here, we aren’t talking training or bike mechanics (much). We are talking about female issues—primarily “lady part” related, and a bit about what beginner (and some pro) women should know to rock a bike ride, from the bike shop experience to the bike shorts experience.

“It’s disheartening to see new cyclists not having fun,” SmartAthlete endurance coach Peter Glassford says, talking about his experience with women who’ve fallen in and—just as quickly—out of love with cycling, whether it’s because they’re intimidated by a local fast cycling club, or because of a nagging saddle sore that just won’t go away. It shouldn’t be like that. “Look for easy group rides,” he suggests, for starters. “Not every ride has to be a sufferfest. Build those groups. The fun part about cycling is just going out and riding with a couple friends, chatting for a couple hours, practicing skills, playing. The perception of what cycling is to different people is so interesting. No one is wrong, that’s the beauty of cycling, different definitions of what riding your bike is.”

If you’re a pro, you know all of this, and you can feel free to jump around to the questions presented in the book that are pertinent to you—some of the information presented may seem tedious, but for some women, it’s all new.

To write this book, I started by talking to several different gynecologists, who also happen to be kick-ass women, some of them also cyclists.
I asked them some of the questions that I’ve never felt comfortable asking before: Some are from personal experience, some are from women who’ve written and asked me for advice.

Let’s stop pretending that riding a bike is easy on our “stuff.” It isn’t. But we can make it better! As Esther Yun, one of our gynecologist panelists said, “I believe it is so important for women to have a good source of information, and also to feel comfortable talking to their doctors if they are unsure about something. Having a good relationship with your gynecologist is important… Believe me, it is excessively difficult to ‘gross out’ or ‘freak out’ a gynecologist… Really! Don’t be afraid to bring up issues that are important to you, even if they feel small. Small problems can lead to bigger ones if not addressed properly and early!”

The goal here is, as Glassford mentions, “To try and cultivate that fun, social part. That’s the enjoyment and that’s how you become a lifelong cyclist.” That’s not easy to do if you can’t put your weight on the saddle without wanting to scream in pain, and that’s where this book comes in.

In this book, I talked to not only gynecologists, but to women behind saddle design, women who work in bike shops, coaches who work with junior women and pro women, and even, in one incredibly strange moment, a bikini waxer, about some of the those questions you’ve always wanted to ask but didn’t feel comfortable bringing up. These people are kick-ass professionals, and many of the ones I spoke with are also cyclists, and spend time with enough cyclists to know what we as women deal with on the bike.

I hope you learn as much as I did.

-Molly Hurford
Throughout the book, you’ll notice that in some sections, I’ve coded the advice:

- Rx: Medical Professional’s Advice
- Whistle: Certified Coach’s Advice
- Wrench: Bike Shop Worker Advice
- Bandage: Athlete’s Personal Advice
The Basics

As a female racer, I’ve had years to learn my way around dealing with my “chamois area” while on the bike—and off the bike! And I’ve met plenty of other women who, after a lot of time spent riding together, finally all sat down and talked about what works for us and what doesn’t.

A few of the top tips I’ve picked up:
The one everyone jokes about, but seriously, it’s a problem. Repeat after me: You do not wear underwear with bike shorts (heretofore referred to as your chamois—pronounce “sham-ee”). This, and I can’t emphasize this enough, is bad for you. The chamois is there to pad your seat a bit, but also to keep the bad bacteria away from your genitals. All underwear does is trap the bad stuff in there. Gross.

Speaking of chamois… Wash your chamois, carefully. This seems kind of obvious but just make sure that when you’re washing your kit, the inside of the chamois is getting clean, because sometimes it doesn’t get as clean during a wash cycle as you might prefer, especially in a big load of clothes. The second part to this is making sure that your shorts are getting rinsed enough. I’ve had a lot of people complain about getting rashes from their chamois, and nine times out of ten when I tell them to rinse their shorts an extra time in the wash, that solves the problem. Leftover detergent plus sweaty, exposed skin = irritation.

Use chamois cream. There are even female-specific ones out there, some for sensitive skin, some with tea tree oil (great for a cleaner feeling), and in a pinch, even a baby diaper cream like Desitin will work. Not mandatory for short rides, but if you’re going to be out on the bike for a while, definitely apply a bit before you head out the door. At first, it takes some getting used to and feels super gross, but trust me, you’ll learn to love it. Invest in a good pair of shorts—this is the number one advice from Samantha Stumpf, a soft goods manager at Park Ave Bike in upstate New York, as well as Beth Leibo, a rep at Assos and a veteran cyclist. One good pair is better than three crappy pairs, any day of the week (though make sure you wash it after every ride!). Get something that fits well, where the chamois
is comfortable and not diaper-like, something that will allow you to go out and do some serious miles. More on this later.

**Be honest with your coach.** I don’t just mean about if you skipped a workout or if you’re having a busy week at the office. I mean let him or her know when your period is, if cramping is an issue, if you have a bad saddle sore, if you’re trying to get pregnant—anything female-health-related is also going to impact your cycling. Guess what? He or she will get it. Maybe the week you have your period is a good week to plan as the rest week in the month. Or maybe, if you’re having severe cramping, your coach will suggest you go to a gynecologist and discuss your options. Your coach wants what’s best for you, and if you’re not being totally honest, it’s impossible for him to do his job. It may feel awkward at first, and you can even mention that it’s a hard topic for you to bring up. But if both of you can be on the same page, you’ll get the most bang for your coaching buck.

**Hydrate and eat enough.** Learning to eat and drink on the bike is a chore. I’ve been riding for a decade and still struggle with taking in enough food and water on rides, and I can point to several races where I know my result would have been better if I’d been more on top of my hydration. Study up on nutrition, and even if you’re trying to drop a few pounds while riding, understand that you will still need to eat and drink on the bike, especially on rides over an hour. If you don’t stay properly fed and hydrated, you won’t be burning fuel efficiently, and you’ll end up hating the bike anyway.

Lastly, and perhaps most subjectively, **my final tip is that being girly is OK.** I get pedicures and manicures on occasion. I have been known to wear mascara on a ride. I put on dresses after races. And you know what? That’s OK. Sometimes, it seems like the cycling industry and the people in the scene have hard-line ideas of what being a racer or a rider is, and those ideals are at odds with what some may consider feminine. You know what? Screw it. If you want to wear lip gloss, go for it. If you don’t, don’t. It’s easy to get hung up on the politics of femininity and sport, but at the end of the day, do what makes you feel the best. And if that’s getting a manicure, I recommend going with shellac—lasts forever, doesn’t chip on MTB rides, and looks fantastic.

I think one of the coaches interviewed here, Peter Glassford, put it best when he said, “Be a female. Embrace that. You don’t need to give everything else up just because you’re a cyclist.”
First of all, not every little bump “down there” is a saddle sore, so don’t panic. In fact, more often than not, it’s not a saddle sore at all.

**A few of the common issues include:**

1. Ingrown hairs: between the irritation of wearing tight-fitting, sweaty spandex and shaving (or even waxing), ingrown hairs are a distinct possibility and may present similarly to a saddle sore. Treatment for this one is similar though, so even if you do the same thing, it will heal.

2. Acne: self-explanatory, and ultimately a saddle sore is just a really big pimple, but smaller breakouts are possible. For this, try an over-the-counter acne cream at night, and sleep either in the buff or in cotton panties to allow for a good amount of air flow.

3. Jock Itch: not just for guys anymore, unfortunately. This fungal infection (think athletes foot for your nether regions) presents in a few ways, and usually in a larger area than a single saddle sore would be. Visually, jock itch can range from dry, red, scaly skin to a whole lot of painful small bumps. It will usually be in “fold” areas, so if you have a rash right where your butt cheek meets your thigh, it might be jock itch, not just a pesky rash. Again, there are over-the-counter antifungals, but if the two-week treatment doesn’t clear it up, check with your doctor.

4. A simple rash: maybe you’re allergic to your chamois cream, maybe you aren’t rinsing your shorts well enough after washing, or maybe you just need a few days off the bike. The best thing to do for a rash—before taking more extreme measures—is to take a cool shower, wash carefully, and give it some time to let it breath before assuming the worst. And double rinse your chamois next time you wash it!

5. Hives: You may have an allergy to something in your chamois, or just a
Weird allergic reaction in general.

6. A saddle sore: it will look like an extra large pimple, and most likely will hurt like the dickens. Most likely, if it is a saddle sore, it will be between your genitals and anus.

Of course, to prevent all of these issues, check out the chapters on proper chamois and saddle fit, as well as the one on post-ride care.

**How do I know if I have a saddle sore?**

*From Coach Peter Glassford:*

A saddle sore is like a pimple, a mound. It may seem similar to an ingrown hair. If you get a sunburn, that'll be similar to a friction rash you might get on your inner thigh, and isn't a saddle sore.

In the saddle contact area, that’s the most common area—between your genitalia and your anus—where you’ll end up with it most often. You’ll be more likely to get rashes or simple breakouts on your thighs or butt cheeks. Saddle sores are from really abusing the tissue while riding and bacteria gets in there, and the best way to describe it is a big pimple. Doing a Daily Check is a great way to prevent a major sore. The first thing you should do is shower when you get off the bike, and do an inspection. See when things are starting to get red, starting to get swollen.

**How can I prevent saddle sores?**

*From Gynecologist Esther Yun:*

Saddle sores are not only very uncomfortable, but can turn into a very serious medical issue if not properly addressed early in the process.
First off, equipment is important. Your bike should fit you properly. If you’re not sure about this, you may want to visit your LBS [local bike shop] for a fitting. Having your weight balanced in the wrong way can predispose you to poor riding position and undue weight on the saddle as a result. Your saddle should be appropriate both for your pelvis (see above) as well as type of activity in order to decrease pressure/chafing to the buttocks.

You should hopefully have a comfortable chamois. Always start your ride with a clean, dry chamois. Some people use chamois creams/butters to help with chafing and as a protectant to help prevent damage to the skin. You may want to consider this if you have very sensitive or delicate skin. Do remember that you are adding another skin product, so beware of allergies/sensitivities as well. Avoid products with perfumes, dyes, or large amounts of preservatives.

Changing positions on the saddle and standing during your ride will also help prevent sores, as it redistributes and relieves pressure.

From Coach Peter Glassford:
The idea with this whole saddle sore concept is not necessarily to find the one issue to cure all sores; that isn’t realistic. But I think if we empower athletes, women specifically, with the ability to tinker and the basic information on hygiene, basic fit, skills, et cetera, then we can greatly reduce discomfort, maximize performance and have more fun.

First of all, you should look at a saddle sore as a limiter: think of it as a way of your body telling you you’re going too far and need to recover. If you’re struggling with saddle sores, a big thing to do is to make change. I take it as a sign that your body isn’t adapting, like any other sign of over-training. Usually I’ll just take a day off. I think people aren’t quick to do that, but I just treat it like any other limiter, whether you’re sore musc-ularly or you have a bad cough.

I think taking a break is the hardest thing to do when it’s just a saddle sore and it’s not your legs, but it’s important.

Similarly, we are so hesitant to make changes to our bikes, especially if it’s a bike fit from the shop or some super pro bike fitter. But making a
change, whether it’s dropping the seat height, changing the saddle, moving the saddle forward—tinkering away with it, can help. I think this idea of tinkering is under-utilized. I think making change and taking control of the situation is something I rarely see. I don’t think bike fit is this mysterious thing that we’ve made it out to be, which is a fairly controversial view. I just don’t believe that if you have decent mobility, every day you need to be within this one millimeter of perfection.

By enabling the athlete to make change when they’re having an issue with fit and stuff, we can improve the situation. Does the saddle sore hurt less if you move the seat up, down, forward, backward? That should be a pretty good indicator, and it’s something you can do with this day off we’re talking about. You can do that in the driveway.

As far as healing, I’ve always been big on tea tree oil and aloe vera after. Just something antiseptic and soothing. If I start getting issues, I use something like Neosporin (an antibiotic ointment).

What should I do about saddle sores?

From Gynecologist Kristi Angevine:
Saddle sores start when friction breaks the surface of the skin enough for bacteria that normally lives on our skin’s surface, to get underneath. This defect plus bacteria forms a sore that can be difficult to care for given its location.

Prevention of sores is best, but if you get one, here’s how to care for it:
1. When off the bike, keep it clean and dry. Wash it with plain soap and water. Let the area breathe by avoiding underwear made of satin or silk. Opt for cotton, wool, any breathable fabrics or no underwear at all.
2. Warm baths and hot compresses can be soothing.
3. Don’t squeeze it! That prolongs healing and increases the chances of a larger infection.
4. If it gets really irritated or is very painful when riding, take a few days off the saddle.
5. For general perineal and vaginal health and not just when there is a saddle sore: wear only clean shorts, not ones that have been worn on a ride before and haven’t been washed. Also, after doing any exercise, change out
of your workout clothing and get clean soon. This means, get out of that chamois before you drive home!
6. See a doctor if the skin around the area gets red, hot, or swollen or if you get a fever.

From Gynecologist Esther Yun:
So what if you have all of the above and you’re still getting saddle sores? This probably means you are spending an awful lot of time on your bike! Great work! Unfortunately, that has led to some discomfort.

After a long ride, the best thing you can do is get out of those biking clothes as soon as possible. If there is any skin damage, you want to decrease the amount of time that skin is in contact with your sweaty chamois (less rubbing) and get it clean and dry quickly. If possible, shower/bathe immediately. If there is skin damage, you can consider a sitz bath or an epsom salt bath to decrease inflammation and soothe the irritated tissues.

Let the area dry completely after bathing. Try not to rub it with a towel; I often suggest women use a hair dryer on cool to dry more sensitive areas if there is any irritation. Rubbing with a towel can irritate the already angry tissue more and if the towel is not fresh, it can seed the area with bacteria and get an infection started.

What about those ingrown hairs?

From Gynecologist Esther Yun:
If you notice little bumps, they are likely due to ingrown hairs or clogged pores (ie: a zit!). The best way to treat this is to use a warm, moist compress. You can use a washcloth soaked in clean, warm water or nuke a moist cloth for 20-30 seconds. If you choose to nuke it, make sure it is not too hot before applying it… No one wants a scalded and saddle sore bum! Make sure you use a fresh washcloth each time—you can do this every few hours, depending on how sore you are until said bump comes to a head and drains, or it settles down.

If it is an ingrown hair, do not pluck it! This is an invitation for it to be a new ingrown hair next week. Let’s not invite trouble… Let the hair come
above the skin surface and let the skin heal completely before shaving/
waxing/removing.

If your saddle sore is more chaffed/broken skin, you can still use the
warm water or epsom salt baths for comfort, but you should keep the skin
as dry as possible. Consider sleeping without underwear to allow the skin
to breathe and heal. Use a protectant while riding until the skin has healed
and remember to get out of those sweaty shorts, showered, and dry as
soon as possible after each ride! Spend as much time in loose, breathable
clothing (or naked!) as you can. If possible, consider taking a few days off
or easy to let the skin heal.

If your saddle sore, has progressed beyond this, it is possible you have
developed an infection, such as an abscess or caused such extensive dam-
age that the fat and/or muscle tissue has broken down (much like bed
sores in the ill). If this is the case, you should consult your physician for
evaluation and treatment.

Last Words

The best thing that you can ultimately do is to keep an eye out for these
issues, and catch them early. The worst thing you can do is to continue
to train and ride as usual without treating them, since saddle sores can
quickly go from bad to worse—there have been cases of ruined season,
surgeries, and permanent disfigurement and discomfort.
Post-Ride Care

What can I do after a ride to make sure I don’t have problems post-ride?

Rx

From Gynecologist Kristi Angevine:
Post-ride care of the perineum is important for men and women alike.
**For perineal health and happy riding, do the following:**
1. Change out of your bike shorts as soon as you are done riding. If you are prone to vaginal irritation or infections, this is particularly important. If you’re sensitive, don’t drive home in that soggy chamois!
2. Get clean as soon as you can. Shower or bathe to get everything clean. If you can’t, use something like a baby diaper wipe or towelette, or even just rinse with some water.
3. Keep in mind, don’t douche or use perfumed spritzers. Plain soap and water are all this area needs. Perfumes or douches can alter the pH of the vagina and disrupt the typical balance of the natural vaginal flora. This imbalance leads to vaginitis, bad smelling discharge and itching.

From Heidi Grissom Bell, MD:
Remove wet clothing as soon as possible. Biking clothing tends to be restrictive/tight/less “breathing” than usual, which are all characteristics that the normal yeast in the vaginal environment love to grow on! Changing in to well-aerated/”breathable” clothing as soon as possible after your work-
out will help prevent chronic yeast infections or vaginal pH changes that could lead to bacterial vaginosis. In general, also, urination after riding helps prevent UTIs—as does wiping “front-to-back” in any situation!

**From Gynecologist Esther Yun:**
The best thing you can do after a ride is to get out of those sweaty shorts and into some clean, dry, breathable clothing. If possible, shower immediately after exercise. If you notice saddle sores or any other irritation, address it nice and early to prevent future problems.

**Last Words**
Are you noticing a trend? Time to give up that habit of stopping by the coffeeshop on the way home from a long ride and lingering in your bike shorts. Change first, then hang out. (I sometimes ride with a spare pair of running shorts in my jersey pocket for when I make stops longer than a few minutes.)
Is it better to ride with a tampon or pad during your period?

**Rx**

**From Gynecologist Kristi Angevine:**
Like most things having to do with vaginal health, this is a personal choice and everyone has their own rationale for their menstrual cycle paradigm. In my opinion, tampons are infinitely easier because unlike wearing a pad, there is no material to contend with. Pads are fraught with many more challenges because they can bunch up, move out of position and ultimately rub in ways that cause skin breakdown and irritation.

**From Heidi Grissom Bell, MD:**
Likely a tampon, with the string tucked enough inside to endure there are no “pressure points” created by it. Pads tend to wrinkle and become irritants to the skin over time, especially if pressed closely to the skin by the bike saddle. If you are uncomfortable inserting a tampon, you can ask your own gynecologist for help/instruction. If pads are used, they should be unscented. Perfumes that are used in scented pads can be really irritating to the skin over time!
From Gynecologist Esther Yun:
This is a very personal issue for many women, as some women are not comfortable with using tampons. At the end of the day, you should use what you are most comfortable with.

That said, there are some advantages to using a tampon. First, there is no object fixed to your chamois with sticky tape, which is certainly not designed to withstand the rigors of cycling. Wearing a pad also changes the padding of your chamois and may cause more chafing. So using a tampon also means no additional chafing from a loose object moving around inside your chamois.

Second, wearing a tampon will decrease the moisture present in the area and therefore decrease irritation to the sensitive skin in the area. The string should also be tucked in to minimize chafing [Ed. Note: I’ve heard this issue referred to as “rope burn”—if it’s a long string, even consider trimming it slightly, but not to the point where you risk losing it.]. With both however, it is essential that you change them on a regular basis, especially if you are having a heavy flow day.

Retained tampons and leaving tampons in for extended periods of time predispose you to risk of infection, specifically toxic shock syndrome.

Leaving a pad in for extended periods of time, especially during and after exercise, and especially while wearing a chamois, will hold and trap moisture, discharge, and bacteria. This can predispose you to bacterial vaginosis and/or yeast infections. Because both these infections can manifest with similar symptoms, it is important to contact your gynecologist if symptoms persist so that you receive the appropriate treatment. Change your pad or tampon as soon as possible after a ride.
Final Thoughts

I love being a female cyclist—especially now that I’ve been doing it long enough and had enough great advice that it’s finally a (mostly) comfortable sport for me! I hope that this book has helped answer a few of your burning questions, and I hope that you’ll share some of the advice in here with other women while you’re out riding and racing.

You’ll notice that throughout this book, I didn’t get into any kind of women’s advocacy, or insert any strong opinions on some of the hot-button issues facing women cyclists today, like if posing for a sexy cyclist calendar makes you an inherently bad person or terrible role model, or if women should get equal payouts at the pro level (it doesn’t, and they should—if you were wondering).

However, the one bit of advocacy I will soapbox for a bit here is the idea of getting more women on bikes worldwide. One of the great organizations I’ve had the privilege of working with in the past year, Afghan Cycles, is a great example of this—thanks to several tireless women led by Shannon Galpin working in the US and visiting Afghanistan with bikes, gear and a whole lot of enthusiasm, the country now has a national cycling team. How cool is that? And to make it even better, there’s a feature-length film being made to tell their story, by an amazing woman film-maker, Sarah Menzies. Check it out at AfghanCycles.com.

There are so many great projects and charities that center around women’s cycling, and I urge every woman reading this to spend a little time volunteering with some of them, whether that means mentoring a younger racer, or helping inner city kids get on ’cross bikes (as the Red Zone Junior Development team out of Louisville does). I think any woman in cycling is in such an awesome, unique position of having this ability to influence other women and get them on bikes, and it’s so thrilling to me every time I hear about anyone getting on a bike for the first time.

There’s not much more I can say about your body and the bike that I haven’t already covered, but I will say this: I was absolutely shocked at how many people were so excited to hear about this book. From pro women racers to beginner women to dads who are struggling with their junior daughters, it was astonishing to me that none of this had been covered before. I tried, and I couldn’t find information about a lot of this stuff online.
This wasn’t a book that I ever thought I would write. For me, saying vagina in public is one of the more uncomfortable things that I have to do—now imagine trying to publicize a book dedicated to them! I realized though, that if as a racer and cycling advocate and writer, I was uncomfortable bringing these issues up to even my gynecologist, imagine how the average beginner woman feels? I’m relatively outspoken, and fairly comfortable with myself and my body, yet writing this was one of the harder things that I’ve ever had to do. We live in a society where sex sells, yet we’re still so repressed that we can’t talk about our reproductive health without getting twitchy. That’s why one of the big things I’m pushing for in here is to just communicate with coaches, gynecologists, bike shop employees—just don’t be afraid to say what you need.

I truly hope that reading this book makes cycling more enjoyable for you—or at least, less painful. I know I learned a lot writing it, and definitely got to use some of the tips from the great gynecologists who helped put this together.

Thanks so much for reading!

A Word for Juniors and their Parents:
“Parents are going to be involved with juniors, and again, it gets to the same issue—parents are grasping at straws too,” says Peter Glassford. “Their girls are changing, you have single dads, it’s a tough time all around. I think the end result should just be talking about it. The coach may not have the answers, but I think you need to start building that network, whether it’s knowing gynecologists or doctors or coaches you’re comfortable talking with about sport.”

Like Peter says, you need to create an environment of open communication, where your daughter can come to you with anything—or at the very least, make sure she knows that she can talk to the family doctor about anything. Puberty is hard, and bike racing isn’t going to make it any easier, but it doesn’t have to be painful. Don’t wait until she has to bring up these issues either—just let her know that is she does have any problems, you’re ready to listen.

If your daughter is part of a team, or you’re part of a club, consider asking a local pro to host a night at a bike shop for just the girls, to openly talk about what it means to be female on the bike. I’ll be conducting some shop nights like this in the future, so keep an eye on saddlesorewomen.com for more details as well.
Acknowledgements

This couldn’t have been done without the help of some seriously amazing people. And for those of you wondering about the doctors and coaches listed throughout the book, here they are!

Kristi Hawken Angevine MD, FACOG
Kristi Angevine is a board-certified Ob/Gyn who attended ETSU’s Quillen College of Medicine in Johnson City, Tennessee. She completed her residency training in Chattanooga, TN, where she has now been in private practice for the last four years. Her husband sparked her interest in cycling over 10 years ago and she primarily enjoys mountain biking and cyclocross. Currently, she is a team member of Motor Mile Racing. Given her interest in women’s health and biking, she has cultivated a passion for health promotion and counseling patients about the benefits of exercise and healthy eating. Beyond her vocation, she likes spending as much time as she can reading, riding, cooking and going on family adventures with her husband, Anthony, and their (amazingly cute, sweet, charming) 18-month-old daughter, Roslyn.

Peter Glassford, R.Kin
Peter Glassford has been an endurance coach for over 10 years with smartathlete.ca. He specializes in bike skill development (bikeskillsproject.com) and the optimization of training in the busy lives of the athletes he coaches. As a Registered Kinesiologist, he provides a unique movement-based approach to the health and performance of his clients. In his own athletic pursuits, he is the Canadian Leadville record holder, fifth at 2013 Canadian XC Nationals and lifetime student of any and all cycling disciplines.

Heidi Bell Grissom
Dr. Bell is a graduate of Brody School of Medicine who returned there on the clinical faculty in 2008 after completing residency at UT-Houston/LBJ Hospital and spending two years in full-time medical mission work in Quiché, Guatemala. She was honored to become the Clinical Clerkship Director for OB/GYN in 2010, and has a passion for curricular innova-
tion and teaching especially at the medical undergraduate level. Outside of medicine, she is the mother of two and spends any free time possible enjoying the musical talents of the regional band “Spare Change,” which her husband Matt plays with. She is an active participant in APGO (The Association for Professors of Gynecology and Obstetrics), and most of her leadership and teaching training comes from APGO’s excellent academic programs, including the APGO Scholars and Leaders Program which she completed in 2013. She’s not an athlete, but love taking care of patients who are and working with them to meet their unique needs as women!

Beth Leibo
A veteran cyclist, Beth began her cycling retail career at Bicycle Sport Shop in Austin, Texas in 1997. After managing a specialty cycling store [Bike Barn] in Houston, Polar Electro hired Beth as a Tech Rep serving their cycling, running and fitness retailers in Texas. After a stint in Colorado, in 2013 Beth returned to Austin as District Manager for Texas Running Company owned by Denver based Running Specialty Group. Now, Beth works with Assos North America.

Janina Haas
Janina has been a sports scientist for the past 26 years, and has worked in the Research & Development department at RTI Sports/Ergon since September 2013. Her focus is ergonomics and product testing there. She earned her Bachelor of Science in “Sports science” at Justus-Liebig-University in Giessen/Germany, and her Master of Science in “Sports Technology” at German Sports University Cologne/Germany, where she wrote her master’s thesis: “Sitting discomfort of female road and mountain bike cyclists: Is it possible to optimize the pressure distribution and to raise the sitting comfort by utilizing specific constructional features?”

Esther Yun
Esther Yun is a practicing obstetrician and gynecologist in Cambridge, MA. She, her husband, and their two akitas spend as much time outdoors as possible. Although she is new to the sport, she has fallen in love with cycling in all forms. Her husband, Dan, runs the Wheelworks Mountain Bike Racing Team and since her racing debut last season, she has been totally bitten by the bug. Besides riding together as much as possible, they hope to inspire and help new riders fall in love with cycling as much as they have.
About the Author

Molly Hurford has been racing bikes and writing about them for the past eight years. Known as “The Girl With The Cowbell Tattoo” in the cyclocross community, she first started her career by writing about irritable bowel syndrome and the science of sports bras for Triathlete Magazine, before settling down as the Managing Editor at Cyclocross Magazine. After writing Mud, Snow and Cyclocross (Deeds Publishing, 2012), she knew that her next book would be about the topic she cared about almost more than cyclocross—women’s cycling. Since her mother already came to terms with writing about poop (just google Irritable Bowel Syndrome and Triathlete Magazine), Molly figured she wouldn’t get disinherited if her second book was entirely devoted to nether regions.

When not writing about bikes, Molly is typically found riding, running, swimming, or reading. She lives primarily on the East Coast but spends most of her time on the road, chasing races and good cycling weather.

Follow her occasionally ridiculous adventures at mollyhurford.com or on Twitter @mollyjhurford.

We aren’t done yet—if you have more questions, visit saddlesorewomen.com

We’ll be regularly posting:
– More answers to reader questions
– More how-to videos
– Video interviews with experts in the field of women’s cycling
– Clinic and bike shop talk dates and locations
– Additional resources
– Lots more fun stuff!
If you were on a ride and sprained your ankle, would you say something to the group you were riding with? Obviously, you wouldn’t just suffer in silence. But what about when you’re out on a ride, and you realize that you’re cramping terribly because you’re just about to get your period? Or you start feeling tingly, or numb, on the saddle? Most women won’t speak up. Most will suffer in silence, come home, and have no idea why they have massive saddle sores—if they even realize what a saddle sore looks like—or how to treat it.

Your level of experience doesn’t matter. I know women from beginners to pros who have questions about their bodies that they aren’t comfortable asking bike shop employees, coaches, or even their gynecologists. We’ve been conditioned to not talk about our “lady parts,” and that touchiness is hurting the female cyclist population, and making riding a whole lot less fun.

Riding shouldn’t be uncomfortable. You shouldn’t be getting saddle sores every ride. Cramping shouldn’t be making you cry on the bike. And you shouldn’t be wearing your underwear with your bike shorts.

Enter “Saddle, Sore”: the first guide that answers all of the awkward, embarrassing, or just plain weird questions that women have had about the bike and their bodies. From gynecologists to coaches to industry professionals, I talked to the experts to find out how to diagnose and treat saddle sores, whether a pad was better than a tampon while riding, what causes numbness on the bike, how to choose a saddle and a chamois, and many other topics.

What readers are saying...
“Thank you for taking on this project! I have a 14-year-old daughter who’s totally into competitive road and cyclocross riding, and I’d love for her to have something like this on her bookshelf!” - Tobin

“I can’t even explain how many times my best friend and I have gone back and forth with awkward questions about saddles, chamois cream, describing where it hurts or where it’s numb, etc. Definitely a subject men just wouldn’t understand!” - Amanda

“This is amazing. I’m the manager for a new all-women’s cyclocross team in DC (bringing ladies together just this year!)—we’re all avid cyclists, active in the community, and I think we would ALL love to read this! Thanks for putting this together!” - Shauna