Cycling ? can it make a man infertile? [1]

Dear Alice,

I'm a man and I'm engaged in a lot of sports and outdoor activities, but lately some of my friends said that biking could result in male infertility. Is this true? How? What are the other activities that could lead to male infertility? How can I stay healthy in terms of fertility?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Talk about news that can send you flying off the handlebars! What your friends mentioned may have some truth to it, but keep in mind that fertility depends on a variety of factors related to the quality and quantity of sperm that you produce. So, don't bring your wheels to a screeching halt just yet.

It turns out that the relationship between male infertility and bike riding may have something to do with maintaining scrotal temperature, which may, in turn, affect sperm count. Scrotal temperature may be affected by a number of circumstances, including sitting on a bicycle seat for over 30 minutes, wearing tight underwear, sitting for a long time, and using laptops (on your lap). The ability to have an erection [2] may also affect fertility. It has been suggested that biking may be related to erectile dysfunction [3] (ED) in men who ride their bikes more than three hours per week, while men who ride for less than three hours a week have a decreased chance of developing ED. However, this research remains inconclusive.

What's a biker to do? For starters, you may want to be a little like Goldilocks by looking for a bike seat that's just right: a bike seat that is neither too hard nor too narrow, but one that is ergonomically designed to address this issue. A salesperson at a bicycle shop can help you choose a seat. When riding your bike, it's a good idea to keep your weight balanced on your "sit bones" (aka ischial tuberosites) to avoid putting pressure on the perineum and genital area. Taking breaks from biking is another way of having your bike and riding it, too. Below are some general tips for fertility:

- Avoid smoking
- Maintain a healthy, well-balanced diet
- Exercise regularly
- Supplement your diet with vitamins such as selenium, zinc, and folic acid
- Try to avoid exposure to toxic chemicals, i.e., pesticides, solvents, heavy metals
- Go easy on the drinks
• Avoid illegal drug use, i.e., marijuana, heroin, cocaine
• Avoid taking steroids, unless directed by a health care provider
• Avoid soaking in hot tubs that have water 102 degrees F (40 degree C) or hotter, or going into saunas for more than 30 minutes

Before you decide to shift gears, keep in mind that biking is still a great form of exercise that improves heart health, lowers your blood pressure, and improves cholesterol levels. Whether you decide to continue biking or not, there are a number of alternative activities that you can do indoors and outdoors. You may want to check out the responses in the Go Ask Alice! fitness and nutrition [5] archives for some tips on other forms of exercise, as well as maintaining a healthy diet.

If you are a student at Columbia and would like to discuss this issue with a health care provider from Medical Services [6] you can make an appointment by calling x4-2284 or by logging in to Open Communicator [7]. You may also want to check out CU Move [8], Columbia’s physical activity initiative, as well as the resources from Dining Services [9]. If you are not at Columbia, you can visit the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation’s BeFitNYC [10] website to keep abreast of all the activities you can participate in the city.

Happy (bike) trails to you!

Alice!
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