

Mountain Bike Setup

Researched and Written by Women's Only Mountain Biking Inc.

It's important to have your mountain bike set up correctly so that it is comfortable, but also to prevent injuries and ensure you are using a full range of motion when riding. The following are guidelines that may help you to make adjustments to the bike you are presently riding or may serve as information to consider when purchasing a new mountain bike. It is difficult to accurately assess and make the necessary adjustments on your own, so have a knowledgeable person help you.

Seat Height

- Sit on your bike with your heels on the pedals, not your feet and put the brakes fully on so the bike does not move.
- The reason for putting the heels on the pedals is:
- When you pedal you should be forcing your heel down on every down stroke. This will offer you more propulsion and power from your pedaling because you are using your hamstring muscles.
- Lower one foot, so the crank arms are straight up and down. (i.e. 12 o'clock and 6 o'clock positions)
- Looking at the straight leg, there should be a very, very, very slight bend in the knee when the pedal is at the 6 o'clock position. The knee is not locked, but there is almost no bend.
- If there is too much bend then the seat needs to be raised.
- If the leg is too straight (i.e. your knee is locked) or you feel like your bum is shifting from side to side when you pedal, then the seat needs to be lowered.
- Use the quick release, an Allan wrench, or a regular wrench to undo the bolt system to move the seat up or down.
- Remember: you want to have your full range of motion in order to make the best use of your strength and power.

Seat Distance

- To decide on seat distance, place both feet on the pedals in your normal riding position. (i.e. clip into your pedals, put your feet in your cages or center the widest part of your foot over the pedal axle.)

- Position your pedals so that the crank arms are parallel to the ground.
- Looking at the forward knee, it should be directly over the ankle. In other words, your shin should be perpendicular to your foot.
- If your knee is too far forward, the seat needs to be moved back. If the knee is too far back (i.e. in a reclined position) the seat needs to be moved forward.
- When moving the seat forward or backward loosen the bolts just enough to slide the seat into the correct position and then retighten them.

Checking the seat height and seat distance is most easily done if you have two people to help you. One person can steady the bike by squeezing the front tire between their legs and holding the handlebars, while the other person can check the bend and positioning of your knee.

Handlebars

- Handlebars are a personal preference.
- Generally for mountain biking, straight bars are one to two inches lower than the seat height.
- Riser bars are up higher, but the top of the stem is never higher than your seat.
- If you have a back injury or regular discomfort your handlebars can be raised a little higher.
- It's recommended that adjustments for handlebars be done in a bike shop, as a new stem may be needed in order to change the distance or angle at which your handlebars are positioned.
- The above are only guidelines and you may not be able to make some of the adjustments suggested on your bike. Make only the adjustments that are possible.

* **Remember:** This information is not provided as a substitute for medical advice. Please consult your doctor if you have concerns about injuries, chronic pain and/or safety.