



Training for Sportives to help you boost fitness and complete the distance - core

One of the most overlooked aspects of exercise and training for bike riding is core work. By this, I mean the stomach and abdomen region of the body including pelvic floors. Having a strong core benefits all aspects of life and is crucial for a bike rider, especially one looking to get the miles in on a sportive. As you get tired, you start to change your position on the bike and this can lead to back, neck, shoulder, hip and knee problems to name a few. People also forget that when you're riding, your hands and legs are often working in opposing ways and so there is a lot of force travelling through the central core area of the body. If you can tie this together with strength training for your core, you should notice a marked improvement in your comfort on the bike and easier climbing up the hills.

A great place to start is knowing how to engage the deep core - pelvic floors - in order to get the best from this work. I spent 6 months standing at an office desk once after a couple of prolapsed disks and had to engage my core and pelvic floors as much as I could for a year. It was a massive help in taking the weight off my back and allowing the injury to recover.

Here I outline a simple core programme and an explanation of how to brace the pelvic floors. This is always hard to explain but I'll do my best.

Stand with your feet parallel and hip width apart.

Imagine screwing your feet into the ground and squeeze your glutes as hard as you can. Don't tilt your pelvis or engage your abdominal muscles at this stage. Stay nice and upright.

Next, imagine pulling your lower ribs in over your pelvis. Again, try to stay nice and upright and not round the shoulders or extend your pelvis.

Now, you need to lock your pelvis and ribs in place with your abdominals. This is the tough bit. Take a deep breath and then exhale. Now, imagine shrink wrapping your spine with your abdomen by pulling in your belly button but you're not hollowing your stomach area. Just bracing the abs and feeling a tough tension deep inside. I always imagine pushing the deep core muscles down to sit right over my pubic bone or pubis. At this point, you should still have your glutes braced as well and be nice and upright. Remember to keep breathing. We're not suffocating ourselves here so you should still be able to breathe easily.

Finally, open the shoulders out a little by pulling your upper arms back and opening your collar bones out but don't move your shoulder blades together. Keep your head neutral and upright.

This takes lots of practice so it's a good idea to practice just this move. I first learnt it lying down which can make the positioning and bracing seem easier.

That's your pelvic floors and deep core braced, or it should be. I use this routine nearly every time I perform any kind of upper or lower body exercise set and before each of the following core exercises. It really helps to spread the load, make you feel stronger and more solid and helps to avoid injuries whilst training.

On bike training

When going uphill, really when out of the saddle, try to think about pushing the pelvic floors down and staying strong around the middle. It's hard to breathe for England, balance, pedal, brace your core and go uphill all at once but if you can do it and concentrate on it just a little, it will help climbing and, it takes your mind off the pain of the hill!

You can also try on the flat so that you relieve your back a little when everything is starting to get tired. Obviously stretching on the bike - standing up, leaning back, twisting and bending forward are a good way to move the lower back around if it starts to get sore and tired too.

Try it a few times on some hills before the event. See what happens and how easy or hard it is. Practice does make perfect.

CORE session:

I do this session 2-3 times a week. Repeat twice. Three times if you're feeling butch and don't rest in between each exercise, move on straight away. Always try to get a warm up in first and if the muscles have had enough, stop. It's not a competition.

Exercise	Time	Notes
Plank	1 min	Brace core and take weight off your back
Russian Twist	1 min	
Leg raises	1 min	Brace core and take weight off your back. Bend knees up if back arches or you get tired.

Bicycle crunches	1 min	
Heel touches	1 min	
Ab crunches	1 min	
Repeat	12 - 18 mins total	

All these exercise can be found on the internet at Youtube. There are some great videos explaining and showing the moves. I'm happy to help if you get stuck.

If you would like to discuss fitness training, training plans, support, motivation or advice, get in touch. I'd be delighted to help you get where you're going. Faster.

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