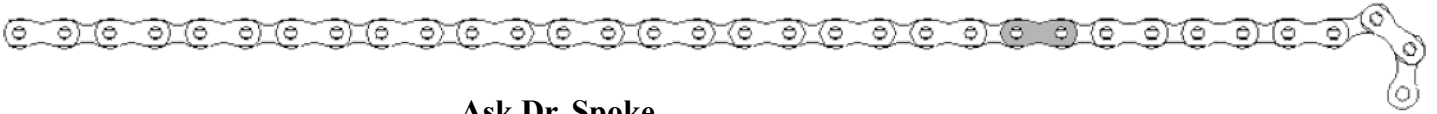


The Freewheel



Ask Dr. Spoke

Dear Dr. Spoke: *Riding for me is just painful. My knees hurt, my hands go numb. Often when I get off the bike, my back hurts too. Some of my friends said my bike doesn't fit properly. Can you help me?*



Numb hands, painful knees and back . . . Takes a lot of the fun out of cycling.

Without seeing you on your bike, my guess is that indeed your bike doesn't fit you very well. Your friends may be right that going for a Bike Fit (making changes to a bike to ergonomically fit the rider) would solve many if not all of your problems. More about that later.

Numb hands can be caused by too much upper body pressure on the bars, insufficient padding in the palm of your gloves, and/or inadequate cushion in the bar tape or grips.

Painful knees can be caused by incorrect saddle position (too high or low) or pushing high gears with corresponding low pedal cadence. High cadence with low pedal pressure may feel counter intuitive but is absolutely essential for comfortable cycling. There may also be a structural abnormality within your knees that has nothing to do with your bike. (Dr. Spoke can't help if that's an issue.)

Back pain can be caused by being stretched out too far. Traditionally, many road bikes right out of the box have had excessively long stems clamped onto drop bars. Many bikes also had long top tubes, which, together with a long stem forced a severe crouched riding position was okay for young, flexible bodies, but even this old "doctor" can't tolerate such a riding position. Then there's the old age-related bug-a boo called arthritis. Let's hope that's not messing with your lumbar vertebrae.

If your bike has the traditional drop bars, consider changing to one of the many so-called flat bar configurations used on hybrids and mountain bikes. That would be the right time to install a shorter stem. Different brake and shift levers, along with resetting your brakes and gears, would also be necessary. Those changes would set you more upright, which could reduce or eliminate both your numb hands and back pain.

These are a lot of variables, so where to start?

Ask your riding buddies to help you make adjustments based on their personal experience. If you haven't already, watch some of the YouTube videos about making adjustments to your bike and how the Bike Fit system is used:

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=bike+fit+kit+system

Ultimately, going to one of the local shops* for a Bike Fit may be the best option. Keep in mind that the Bike Fit system assumes that you are free of anatomical limitations such as arthritis and/or spinal abnormalities. The system cannot account for age-related limitations, so the recommendations may be no more than a guide for changes. They are not necessarily the final word. By the way, after the "doctor" paid for a bike fit a few years ago, he had to lower his saddle about a cm to relieve lumbar pain and later on had to raise the stem and change the handlebars. But at least the Bike Fit gave him a baseline from which to make appropriate adjustments.

*Two local bike shops (there may be others) that currently offer the Bike Fit system using your existing bike are:

- Fat Tire Cycles: 345-9005, \$150. See Erik Farina.
- Sport Systems: Sport Systems: 837-9400, \$65-\$85. See David.
- (High Desert Bicycles is not offering the service during the health restrictions.)

Of course, if you're considering the purchase of a new bike, Dr. Spoke recommends that you base the decision on the results of dimensions produced from a Bike Fit.

Finally, be prepared to experiment with changes based on credible suggestions from friends and/or "experts."