



## CYCLING FACT SHEET No. 54

# Finding a good fitting bicycle for women

The number of women taking up cycling for recreation, sport or as a means of transport has grown rapidly in recent years, but many of them are forced to use a bicycle with a less than ideal fit.

Most mass-produced frames are designed with a geometry that caters for the average rider, and because more men than women cycle, this rider is a 180cm tall male.

Women typically have shorter torsos, longer upper legs, greater gluteal mass, smaller feet and a more “toe down” pedalling technique than men.

This in turn means they need to sit further back and slightly higher than is commonly realised, to fully support their weight on the saddle. Regularly riding a bike that doesn't fit properly can produce soreness in the hands, neck, shoulders and pubic area.

Many standard bicycle frames have a top tube that is too long for women, forcing them to lean forward and leading to pressure on the back, shoulders and neck.

Seat tube angle is another problem on standard bikes – women have proportionally longer thighs than men so they need to sit further behind the bottom bracket (containing the spindle that the pedals attach to) and this requires a less steep tube angle.

A few manufacturers have begun producing women-specific models that have shorter top tubes and better seat tube angles, but care needs to be taken because some bicycles claiming to be women-specific differ little from the standard models and are more about using feminine colours and clever marketing than functionality.

The most comfortable riding position for all cyclists is hands placed about shoulder-width apart on the handlebars, but as most women have narrow shoulders, they often use a splayed grip that can cause sagging between the shoulders and eventual neck soreness.



Having small hands can make it hard to reach the brake levers in their normal position, but the levers can be moved so they are easier to reach, and special short-reach levers are available.

Thankfully, women can easily find a comfortable seat, with some very good female saddles catering for wider sit bones now being widely available.

It is strongly recommended that women in the market for a new bicycle visit a bike shop that offers a good fitting service, using professional measuring equipment to accurately ascertain an individual's anatomical needs. Once these measurements are known, a mass-produced bicycle can be adjusted to some extent, and items such as offset seat posts and longer saddle rails added.

Custom or made-to-measure frames usually cost about twice that of an equivalent off-the-shelf frame, but for women cyclists who do a lot of riding it is a worthwhile investment.

***This fact sheet is one of a series dealing with the use of bicycles for recreation and transport in Western Australia. The series looks at a range of cycling-related topics including ride routes, touring tips, maintenance, safety, road rules, insurance and product reviews. You can find more cycling fact sheets online at [www.transport.wa.gov.au/cycling](http://www.transport.wa.gov.au/cycling)***

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