

Saddle Sores - Causes, Treatment, and Prevention

By David Petersen, Mr. BestRest
With Dr. Scott Reichard, MD



Ok, so you're gonna get a laugh at this article. This topic is sure to generate a bunch of funny and off-color comments. We'll laugh with you. This topic is actually pretty serious because it can (or already has) affected ever rider at some point; when you get a case of saddle sores you'll appreciate what you've learned here.

Unlike most of my articles I'm not writing about any products I sell here at BestRest. This is written for the good of my fellow man and my motorcycle friends. That being said, I'd appreciate you taking a few minutes and going to my website. We've got some interesting gear for our fellow riders: <https://bestrestproducts.com/>

Call it what you will: saddle sores, saddle rash, monkey butt, swamp ass, chub rub, etc. These are all medical conditions that can quickly bring your ride to an uncomfortable end. For simplicity I'll refer to all the variations of these medical conditions as **The Rash**. The fact that this rash is located on your back end makes it even more uncomfortable and socially embarrassing.

Those medical conditions are not to be confused with getting a sore butt from spending 8 hours in the saddle. A good saddle will let you ride longer with less fatigue. A sore butt is caused by muscle cramps, uneven pressure on your backside, and poor posture. A properly designed saddle will reduce fatigue, spread the load, and increase your riding time and experiences. A badly fitted saddle will give you hot spots, a numb butt, and other symptoms, all of which can lead to saddle sores or a bad rash. If your saddle isn't comfortable you can get it rebuilt to fit your profile, or you can fit a sheepskin cover, a beaded cover, an air inflation pad, or some sort of gel pad. Each option provides improved comfort. Each comes with a price.

Motorcycle Saddles - They Create Sore Butts

Most reports of sore butts begin trickling in when the riding season kicks off. (We know because we subscribe to a newsletter that gives daily reports on Butt Hurt and other important topics – the numbers are staggering, the suffering is global). Back to my point, the sun shines, the urge to

ride hits hard, and off we go. We're not used to sitting on ANY seat for several hours, so we get cramps and we get sore butts. The best solution is to stretch one leg at a time as you're riding, or stand for a short period. Shake things out. You should also stop riding every hour or two, get off the bike and walk around a bit, stretch, and work out those sore places. Taking over-the-counter anti-inflammatory such as Motrin or Advil will reduce sore muscle spasms, as will pain relievers such as Tylenol.

The good news is that the more we ride the more we get used to the saddle. After 3 or 4 trips we hardly notice that hard saddle that caused us so much grief last month.

The Rash - And The Causes Behind it

Getting back to **The Rash**. What is it? It's a condition where your skin has become irritated and inflamed. It can happen anywhere on your body, but this article is focusing on your nether regions. The medical term is dermatitis: "a condition of the skin in which it becomes red, swollen, and sore, sometimes with small blisters, resulting from direct irritation of the skin by an external agent or an allergic reaction to it." This irritation can be caused by a number of things, including chafing caused by clothing, or chafing caused by a poorly fitted saddle. If your skin is exposed to moisture over a long period of time this chafing process will be accelerated. Eventually your outer layers of skin will abrade, leaving the subcutaneous nerves exposed. That's when things really get painful. If **The Rash** isn't treated it can become infected, you can develop oozing sores, and in a worst case scenario you can get blisters, cysts, ingrown hairs, and other nasty things that can send you to a hospital, ending your ride for a very long time. As an example, when a Tour de France rider gets a case of **The Rash** their only cure is to get off the bike for a couple weeks until things heal. So ends their quest for glory. So ends your week-long trip that you've planned all year.

How do you know if you have **The Rash**? Trust me, you'll know. You'll have painfully raw spots on your backside. Whenever you sit on the saddle it hurts. Whenever your clothing slips past that spot it hurts. Standing doesn't help much. As much as you try to ignore **The Rash** it's always on your mind.

Riding in cold weather usually means you're not sweating and because you're bundled up against the cold you're probably not moving around much on the bike. Chafing and moisture build-up is minimal. **The Rash** seldom happens at temperatures below 70 degrees because the amount of sweat you generate is absorbed by your clothing.

The Rash is usually associated with riding in warm weather. As temperatures rise, your body sweats and it sweats a lot. On the rest of your body that sweat evaporates, but just below your waist it tends to accumulate. If sweat isn't wicked away from your skin, you're setting up ideal conditions for **The Rash**. Layers of riding gear tend to keep moisture close to the skin, so while ATGATT is prudent and something we should always practice, it can actually compound the problem. I'm not advocating less riding gear, instead I'm suggesting the proper type of riding gear; more on that later.

Another scenario to consider is when you get soaked by a passing rainstorm. You weren't wearing your rain suit. You've just added moisture to the clothing and chafing equation. Your arms and legs might dry out fairly quickly due to air flow, but your rear end stays wet for hours. If you wear a cooling scarf or cooling vest, excess water dripping off those garments always seems to pool in your drawers. Keeping things dry down there is more important than you think.

If you're a street rider you might not move around on the saddle very much. But if you're riding off-road then you're constantly standing, sitting, leaning, and changing your body position in relation to the bike. Every time you do that your riding gear rubs against your skin. On a 2-hour ride you might not notice this, but on an all-day trail ride, or on a long distance adventure ride you'll suddenly become keenly aware of how much chafing you're getting on your backside.

Leave that skin unprotected or untreated and you're setting yourself up for sadness. Sadness goes by the name of **The Rash**.

Undergarments Can Reduce The Rash

Let's talk undergarments. Selection of underwear can play a big role in preventing **The Rash**. Here's the most important tip: AVOID COTTON AT ALL COSTS! It traps moisture and stays wet for hours. What you want to wear is a wicking undergarment that will allow moisture to pass thru the layers and evaporate. The fabric should be smooth and soft with no exposed seams so it can easily slip across your skin. Bicyclists have known this for years, which is why you see them pedaling around in their tight fitting Lycra bike shorts with an integral chamois pad. Lycra slips across their tiny leather saddle and prevents chafing, while the chamois pad provides padding and moisture absorption.

For motorcyclists I recommend garments made by Moto-Skiveez. <http://motoskiveez.com/> Designed by a motorcycle rider who understands the importance of proper wicking and chafing prevention, these garments combine a wicking Lycra material with a gel-type pad that reduces hot spots. The pad is designed so you get some air flow where it's needed. Yeah, that gel pad makes you look like you're wearing adult diapers, but I'll take function over appearance any day.

I wear Moto-Skiveez and swear by them. They're not cheap, but I place a high value on keeping my backside in prime condition, so I gladly spent the money. One might say my butt comes before my wallet. And I might add that cleanliness of your garments is next to godliness. Clean clothing is critical when it comes to avoiding **The Rash**.

I won't go into detail when it comes to outer garments; that's beyond the scope of this report. You probably have your riding gear, which must fit comfortably or you wouldn't keep wearing it. If you're considering new gear make sure it leaves plenty room below the waist. If your gear cuts or binds, that spot will be a target for **The Rash**. It's relentless; it's like The Borg, tirelessly seeking new territory, always looking for a place to attack. If possible, sit on your bike as you try out the gear. Make sure it fits before you plop down your credit card.

The Rash Is Gender Neutral

Although I wrote this article mainly for the guys, everything applies to the gals. Pay Attention Ladies: You're already miles ahead of the guys because you're wired to be more in tune with these issues. One might say you have a "leg up" on the competition. Generally speaking the Ladies pay more attention to personal hygiene and for that reason they take proactive measures long before things become a problem. If they've raised children then they've also got practical experience when it comes to keeping the kids from developing a rash, and they know how to treat a rash when it occurs. Conversely, the Ladies have an added hurdle in the form of yeast infections caused by damp skin and other factors. Apply what you already know, add the info described in this article, and you'll avoid problems in the future.

Powders To Prevent The Rash

Let's talk powder. Lots of riders think they'll avoid **The Rash** if they sprinkle a generous amount of powder Down There. Yes, and No. There's powder... and then there's powder. For anti-chafing and moisture control you can use talcum powder, calamine powder, and corn starch powder. Not all powders are created equal; each has benefits and drawbacks. Here's the scoop:

Baby Talcum Powder. Talcum powder lubricates the skin. It's the world's softest mineral. It's been used for at centuries to powder the backsides of infants. It makes the skin slippery, allowing folds of fabric and skin to slip past each other. It absorbs moisture to a point, but when there's

too much moisture it will eventually become a paste, almost like cookie dough. When that dries the dough turns into abrasive flakes that feel like gravel and act like sandpaper. There's been some concern in recent years about the health effects of talcum powder and some folks are allergic, so talcum powder might not be an option for you.

Shower To Shower ®. This is a brand name for a popular body powder, used as an underarm deodorant, or for anti-chafing purposes. The main ingredient is talcum powder, the rest are fillers and perfumes. It's also marketed as a feminine hygiene product. Several recent studies and lawsuits allege that talcum applied to the genital area can increase a woman's risk of ovarian cancer, which is alarming regardless of gender.

Anti Monkey Butt ®. Most riders have heard of a product called "Anti Monkey Butt". Clever name, great marketing. Created in 2003 by a couple of dirt bike riders, it's a combination of corn starch and calamine powder. Their website says, "You can use Original Anti Monkey Butt to protect you from a multitude of skin irritations like blistering feet, between skin folds, where sports pads rub against your skin, etc. Great for any activity – from cycling, truck driving, horseback riding, hiking, attending festivals or any indoor/outdoor activity where you need to keep that swampy, monkey butt feeling from ruining your day."

True, true, and true... up to a point. I've used it before and it has good anti-chafing properties, but the calamine ingredient was a bit harsh for my delicate system. Calamine has antiseptic and anti-allergic properties, so for some people it may be helpful. Don't throw this baby out with the bath water because it's a good product.

Gold Bond Medicated Powder ®. The active ingredient is menthol which treats itching. The inactive ingredients are zinc oxide for skin protection, and talcum powder for anti-chafing properties. Again, I find this product a bit harsh on my skin, sorta like slapping aftershave on my freshly shaved face. The good news is that Gold Bond contains zinc oxide, which I will discuss below.

Corn Starch. Corn starch is something we normally associate with cooking, but it can also be used for health reasons. It has a soothing quality and it lubricates the skin. It has moisture absorbing qualities and has no scent which is important to some folks. But, as with talcum powder, once it gets saturated with moisture it turns into a gooey paste. And when it dries it becomes abrasive.

Inner Tubes. The one benefit of carrying any of these powders is that they can be used to lubricate an inner tube when you install tires or make a field repair. Sprinkle them on the tube and the tire and it lubricates the rubber, allowing the tube to move into place within the carcass. Without powder the tube can get a kink which leads to a hot spot and eventual failure. This is why I always carry a couple Talc Tubes on the bike.

Cremes To Prevent And Cure The Rash

Why use a creme or ointment when you're trying to prevent moisture build-up? Isn't that counter-productive? No, it's not. Some cremes and ointments can actually provide superior moisture protection and anti-chafing properties. Ewww, icky, most people don't want to smear any kind of creme Down There. It's kind of creepy, they'd rather sprinkle powder. I get it. But we're talking performance over appearance, right? Right.

A retired Army buddy once told me how he and his fellow soldiers would go on long field marches in all kinds of weather. One common problem they suffered was called "chub-rub". That happens when a man's privates continually rub up against their undergarments. Chafing occurs, blisters can form, and the soldiers can actually become a casualty, unable to perform their duties.

The Army takes this seriously. So how do they solve this issue? Vaseline, lots of it. And they also focus on keeping things clean and dry.

Vaseline®. In addition to all the other things you can use Vaseline for, this is actually a pretty good ointment to prevent (and treat) **The Rash**. It coats the skin and provides lubrication, preventing chafing against your clothing. It also lubricates the folds of skin where your leg meets your bum, and it lubricates between your "cheeks". Don't crack a smile and don't laugh, remember this is a serious medical article.

From their website, "Vaseline Jelly works by creating a sealing barrier between cells in dry or damaged skin which locks in moisture and speeds up your skin's natural recovery process, helping it to heal from within. Its occlusive function allows it to protect dry skin, cracked skin, minor cuts, scrapes, and burns."

By way of application technique -, take a big glob of Vaseline and apply it generously to the front, middle and rear of your bum. Then do it again. In this case more is better. It's a messy job but someone has to do it. Don't forget to put it in the creases of your legs, and at the end of your – ummm - soldier. Sure, your undies will get goeey, but they can be washed.

Trust me when I say this - Vaseline works. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure... or better stated, a glob of Vaseline is worth its weight in gold. You can reduce your chances of getting **The Rash** by about 90% if you treat yourself before you ride. If you apply Vaseline after your symptoms develop you're a little late to the party. You'll still get some relief, and your skin will begin the healing process, but in the meantime you'll be suffering... silently suffering, because nobody wants to hear about it.

Boudreaux's Butt Paste®. This is a pediatrician recommended diaper rash ointment containing up to 40% zinc oxide, along with mineral oil, paraffin and petrolatum. Equivalent to Desitin, it can be ordered from Amazon and it may be on your local grocery shelf.

Desitin®. Let's talk diaper rash. We've all been babies at one time, and some of us still act that way. Back when we were in diapers our loving Mom and Dad smeared Desitin on our backsides whenever we got a case of diaper rash. They knew we weren't happy because we cried like a baby. Literally. That rash was caused by moisture against the skin, and that moisture led to skin irritation. The moisture came in two forms - liquids and solids, use your imagination. Mom and Dad would carefully clean our mess, then they'd apply a layer of Desitin. As they performed that thankless task we would smile and giggle and blow spit bubbles, which was really cute back then. If you're still blowing bubbles these days, it's gone out of style.

The Rash is nothing more than good old-fashioned case of infant diaper rash, but written on a grand scale a few decades later, while you're riding a motorcycle.

The active ingredient in Desitin is zinc oxide. Wonderful stuff. Desitin contains about 40% zinc oxide, plus glycerin and a few other things that will help you heal. From their website, "Some of the earliest and most common skin care products containing zinc oxide may already be found in medicine cabinets. Zinc is the key ingredient in many diaper rash creams, calamine lotions, sunscreens, and vitamin supplements. Zinc oxide has several benefits, such as protecting the skin from harmful bacteria, soothing minor skin irritations, and accelerating tissue growth. Mineral zinc supplements and compounded zinc oxide can be used both internally and externally to achieve maximum skin care benefits. Zinc has been shown to help heal skin ulcers, cold sores, abrasions, burns, and a variety of other skin irritations. Topical treatments have also been used for post-surgical wound healing and even some applications in dentistry. The body requires zinc minerals, among others, for the synthesis of collagen the main component of connective tissue. Zinc also regulates enzyme functions needed to repair epidermal wounds."

Note the underlined emphasis on "epidermal wounds". That means your skin has a cut, a blister, or a raw spot that's causing problems. If you have **The Rash** you have an epidermal wound. Few things heal the skin quicker and better than an application of zinc oxide.

We've all seen the lifeguards at the beach or at the pool... their nose is white. That's a layer of zinc oxide designed to provide the maximum level of sun block, plus it also heals the skin. Score two points. I suppose you could use Desitin on your nose to prevent sunburn, but the consistency is a bit thin because it's designed to be applied to your bum. Or you could use a sun blocking lotion with high levels of zinc oxide and apply it to your bum, but your rear end would smell like coconut oil. In a pinch use what you have.

Cleaning Things Up

You've been riding all day, you're hot and sweaty, and you need to use the facilities to download last night's freeze dried meal. At home you probably have a good supply of the softest toilet tissue money can buy - it has pillows or corrugations and it's softer than a fluffy cloud. It may even have some lotion in it so your skin is left silky smooth. But today when you roll into an interstate rest area all you'll find the cheapest tissue on the planet. The State bought it by the truckload on a low-bid contract, so it has twigs and bark and other bits in it. Think of it as rolled sandpaper in a convenient wall-mounted applicator. It's so abrasive you'll probably think twice before using it to blow your nose.

Due to the nature of the human skin, when it's been wet for a while it becomes very soft. The area between your legs has been wet for hours. And when it's soft your skin is easily damaged. So when you use that sandpaper it does maximum damage in minimum time, which is the Perfect Storm to create the proper conditions leading to a bad case of **The Rash**.

The best alternative to questionable toilet tissue? Carry a small, soft pack of baby wipes, the pre-moistened ones in a soft and re-sealable pouch. (Don't get the hard boxes because they're difficult to pack). As with Vaseline and Desitin, you can find those pouches in the infant/diaper aisle at any store. When you use the wipes pretend you're cleaning an infant. Be thorough and work carefully. If it makes you feel better, you can giggle and blow spit bubbles as you clean things up. Then re-apply your Vaseline or Desitin. Don't put on more powder. Trust me on this.

One big benefit of those moistened wipes is you can also use them for other chores, like cleaning your hands, washing your face, and you can even do a quick field-shower so you don't smell like a gymnasium locker. Your riding buddies will appreciate your efforts at social hygiene. Oh, and they also work in a pinch to clean bugs off your face shield, but you'll need to buff the shield afterwards to remove the glycerin in the wipes. A better wipe for your face shield is a pack of Cycle Wipes.

One more thing - that rest area might have running water and a soap dispenser. "Might" is the key word in that sentence. Some of them are so filthy I wouldn't go near them for love nor money. Be prepared and carry a small bottle of hand disinfectant. Put it in a zip-lock bag along with the baby wipes, and if you have enough room include half a roll of your favorite pillowey floral print tissue. The kind with body lotion and a fresh spring scent. You can always use it to blow your nose.

Prevention Is The Key

I've seen Facebook posts where a rider was in agony due to an advanced case of **The Rash**. He was unable to ride and he was so desperate for answers that he posted his dilemma and asked for advice. He didn't give a hoot about the embarrassment of sharing his situation, all he wanted was relief. His journey had come to a halt until he could find solutions. Don't let that happen to you. If you think it won't, you're kidding yourself. It's just a matter of time.

If you're just going out for an afternoon ride then all this preparation, the powders, cremes, and wipes might not be necessary, but if you're going for a weekend or longer, take a few minutes and spend a few bucks. Test a few of the products I mentioned above. Do your homework before you ride so you don't end up with **The Rash**. Once you've had it, you'll never want to get it again. DAMHIK. Trust me, once again.

Ride safe, we'll see you on the trail.

David Petersen
Scott Reichard

Desitin, Anti Monkey Butt, Boudreaux's Butt Paste, Vaseline, and Shower To Shower are registered trademarks of their respective companies.

© 2017 BestRest Products LLC
6710 220th St SW #2
Mountlake Terrace, WA 98043
www.BestRestProducts.com
425.673.1023

This article may be copied and publically disseminated by private parties, under the condition that it not be edited or modified in any manner, and that full credit and reference be given to BestRest Products LLC. Publishing or dissemination for commercial purposes is prohibited without licensing approval. Contact BestRest for details.