INTRODUCTION

During the 1890s, the bicycle was hailed as a health-giving technology, its popularity fueled by the Victorian era fervor for "hygiene," or sanitary living and self-improvement. But the exertions, aches, and pains associated with "the wheel" were also new and unfamiliar, producing anxiety about bicycling's physical effects.

While many doctors celebrated bicycling's health benefits, others warned darkly of new pathologies and life-altering injuries. Some of these warnings were targeted at women, to dissuade them from taking up the wheel at a time when the bicycle was increasingly viewed as a vehicle for feminine self-empowerment.

Drawing directly on historical sources, this comic explains some of those most disconcerting pathologies.
**BICYCLE FACE**

The facial contortions produced by the struggle to balance a bicycle. Very serious.

Stood back, side-effect of enthusiasm.

Women are very susceptible! Makes them ugly!

Bulging eyes, clenched jaw

**Symptomology**

- Permanently frazzled mien
- Pinched face, pointed nose
- An expression of weariness

"...usually flushed, but sometimes pale, often with lips more or less drawn, and the beginning of dark shadows under the eyes..."—Literary Digest 1895

**CYCLIST’S SORE-THROAT**

The Infective Power of Dust!

The Lancet (1898) reports:

"After a 'spin' along a more or less dusty road, the cyclist sometimes experiences a dry and subsequently sore throat, headache and depression often follow..."

**Bacteriology of Road Dust**

- Pus
- Tetanus
- Edema
- Tubercle
- Septicemia

"The mischief to riders... would largely be averted if, as nature intended, the respiration were rigidly confined to the nasal passages and the mouth kept comfortably though firmly shut."
Cyclist's Neuralgia
Perineal Problems

The "pommeling of the perineum" causes:

**Men**
- Tender anus, testicles
- Shriveling penis
- Urine trickling down legs
- Increase in masturbation and sexual indulgence.
- Early impotence

"The bicycle is a nuisance and a curse instead of a blessing"
- J.A.M.A., 1898

**Women**
- Uterine displacement
- Distorted pelvic bones
- Hardened perineum
- Contracted birth canal
- Inability to propagate
- Spinsterhood

Anatomical Saddles for Pelvic Hygiene

Christy

Cyclomania

I committed a patient with a chronic psychosis

He suffered from a most unnatural passion for wheeling!

He rode too often, too far, and too fast...

... to the point of mania!

... Cyclomania, actually.
BICYCLE FOOT
"Traumatic Flat Foot"

The bicycle foot is a new disease developed by women riders...

...from careless or incorrect dismounting...

Healthy ligament

fig. 1
A stylish boot.

Damaged ligament, no longer holds up arch of foot

...and wearing thin-soled French-heeled boots.

BICYCLE HANDS
Its progression

Phase 1
An unskilled beginner throws his weight forward...

fig. 1
A tight grip

gripping the handle bars as "a last hope between life and death."

Phase 2
Exacerbated by the vibration of the wheel, the nerves succumb...

...producing numbness in the fingers and palms.
Phase 3

Following the numbness... comes a weakness of the principal muscles of the fingers...

...making the act of holding anything with a tight grip almost impossible and very painful.

My heavens!

Phase 4

A trembling like palsy follows this stage, and the sufferer ends...

Ach!!

...by losing the use of the member entirely.

---

**Kyphosis Bicyclistarum**

"Bicycle Stoop"

---

**The Fate of the Scorcher**

- Acute spinal curvature
- Skeletal deformity
- Dyspeptic, tramp-like appearance

Fig. 1: On the Wheel

Fig. 2: Off the Wheel

---

"An ugly thing should have an ugly name. And if human perversity has invented anything much uglier for which this verbal cacophany stands, the fact is not yet recorded in the annals of the closing century."

Fig. 3: For eternity
Sources


Bicycle Face: • A. Shadwell, "The hidden dangers of cycling," Living Age 212, 1897 • "The Bicycle Face," The Literary Digest, Sept. 7, 1897 • "The Unrestrained Demon of the Wheel," Judge, Sept. 23, 1893.


Back Cover: "Bicycle Riding Denounced," Burlington Weekly Free Press Aug. 6, 1895

"To my mind, owing to the excess of exercise indulged in by bicyclers of today, when a man or woman buys a wheel, they take the first spadeful of earth from their graves."

- Dr. Heine Marks, St. Louis, 1895