

Preface

The collapse of my exercise program snuck up on me like a shark rising in silence from the depths. Then it sunk its teeth into my feet. And shook.

At the time, I was no stranger to the rigors of regular exercise. I had been through just about all the stresses and strains possible from strenuous workouts, and had kept at it for many years. I had just finished my sixth season as a recreational but serious runner, training for and running races year-round. During that time, I had completed numerous 5Ks and 10Ks, four 10-mile races, and three half marathons. I wasn't really born with the ideal body type of a long distance runner, with a heavier, stockier frame than that of many running competitors. As a rhinoceros running amongst gazelles, my lower body took a significant beating. I endured frequent shin splints, a tenderized lower back, pummeled hamstring muscles, and pulverized calves over the course of most races. Yet despite the beatings, my body would soon recover after a bit of rest, and I'd be back out running in no time.

Before I became serious about running, I was a hardcore wrestler and judo competitor for 15 years. Between practice and tournaments, I was slammed, wrenched, and twisted into a pretzel regularly. Aches and pains cropped up in my knees, shoulders, neck, and just about every other place. But similar to my running experience, I conquered each injury with a little rest, a little ice, and a little time. I was never incapacitated to any great extent, and never experienced a long layoff due to injury.

In addition, during the 20 years plus spent between running and wrestling sports, I never encountered a problem with my feet. Not once. And every other athletic-related setback was so temporary I'd soon forget I had even experienced it. I knew I wasn't indestructible, but after rounding the 40-year mark, and still grinding away with a rigorous exercise regimen, I began to see myself as a bit unstoppable. One of those few who could just keep going and going. Heck, I didn't even need to stretch.

Then plantar fasciitis twirled into my life like a buzz saw, severing that illusion.

It started out as a hint of discomfort. Just an insignificant intruder down in the back of my shoe. At first, I ignored it and continued on with my activities. In fact, as I ran, the slight pain disappeared, and I could then complete the course. Sure, the pain would recur, especially first thing in the morning, but I unknowingly assumed it was another short term battle scar. And I could just run it off. The pain transformed from slight to sharp, at times intense enough to make me limp. I'd just run a little faster. A little longer. Problem solved. Until the pain returned that evening, and even more so the next morning. I continued to push through it, and waited for the injury, whatever it was, to heal itself.

This cycle continued until I could no longer run without excessive discomfort. I was lucky to be able to go for a walk without pain. At that point, one or both feet would fire up with alarming pain upon my first few steps out of bed. This began to occur most mornings. Sometimes it was bad enough that I would need to steady myself on the dresser or a piece of furniture to avoid the piercing feeling. As the morning progressed, my feet would loosen up and walking became possible. Most of the discomfort would subside for the time being. However, the waves of pain would generally resume in the evening.

The situation became unpredictable. The soreness remained for a while, but within a couple of weeks it started to fade. Bingo, I'm healed. Great, I'm going running. And out I went, and ran myself right back to square one. The return of the swelling and painful flare-ups was worse than ever. I had mistakenly jumped back in too soon, and running became

out of the question. The discomfort developed into the sensation of a steak knife sticking into my heel. I even stopped walking to let my feet rest. Give them a break for two or three weeks, I figured.

Four months after my exercise regimen was derailed, the plantar fasciitis remained. It became clear to me this was no ordinary injury. No more running, no more rigorous hikes. Long walks were hazardous. I could barely stroll through the house without limping. Standing in place in a grocery store became painful.

Terror started to mount. What had I done to myself? I began to suspect the worst. Was I now crippled? As far as I could remember, all I did was run a lot, walk a little, and go on some hikes. Aren't those things supposed to be good for you?

After some quick research, I verified that these grueling symptoms were in fact classic signs of plantar fasciitis, a condition I had heard of now and then but hadn't thought about much. Some sources even referred to it as the "dreaded plantar fasciitis." Couldn't have said it better myself.

Now desperate, I scrambled to find more information on treating plantar fasciitis. The condition is mainly remedied with home treatment, it turned out. Surgery is rarely recommended, and often not helpful even if it is used as a solution. I had found a few suggestions on how to relieve plantar fasciitis, and put them into practice. But these brief bits of advice were only pieces of the puzzle. I needed more to whip this thing.

So I became a hunter-gatherer of information. As I began an exhaustive search for answers, I uncovered snippets of advice here and there. Some books had only a single page covering plantar fasciitis, and some reputable exercise magazines contained a single short article, often less than a page. Some websites presented a checklist telling *what* to do, but not many details on *how* to do those things. I rarely came across bad advice. It was all valuable, but on the other hand, it was too brief. Avoid this, stretch that, you're healed, on to the next subject.

But that wasn't what I was realizing; it wasn't what I was living. The dilemma of healing a case of plantar fasciitis turned out to be tricky and complex. I was reminded of this with each wince in the morning upon my first steps out of bed. Reminded of it with each rest break I was forced to take after just a few blocks of walking. Or with each stop to adjust my shoes and stretch just to complete my walk. I was reminded of this for months, as time rolled by and my feet didn't heal.

There's not one simple remedy for plantar fasciitis. And there's not just one cause of it, and not just one category of athlete, exerciser, worker, or walker who can acquire it. In my opinion, the intricacies of treating plantar fasciitis warranted more than just one page in a book or a short article. And this was further evidenced by the range of treatment information I uncovered: different sources stated completely different suggestions. The sources didn't contradict each other, really. They simply gave different directions to heal the same condition. And this illustrates a couple of things: 1) the severity of plantar fasciitis can vary greatly, and 2) the vast array of body types, fitness levels, and foot characteristics respond in unpredictable ways to a given treatment. Everyone is unique. The specifics of each person's injury can be unique also, and what works for one person may not be right for another. Or it may not be enough. For plantar fasciitis rehab, a lot of information and a lot of possible recovery actions are a good thing.

I proceeded to locate and harness every bit of plantar fasciitis treatment info I could find and consolidate all of it: to gather the facts, make sense of them, and work out a system to

get my feet healthy again. Using the findings and advice of researchers, elite athletes, and medical professionals, I devised my own recuperation plan. I even found out a few things by experimentation that spared me some pain and helped me avoid reinjury. I added these items to the plan as I went.

Did the recuperation plan work? Well, at the most severe point in my plantar fasciitis trauma, I could barely walk five blocks. Six months after committing to the plan, I ran all-out in the Portland Marathon's 5-mile race. In the days following the race, I experienced no additional discomfort in my feet, despite the grueling run (the rest of my body hurt, but I digress!). And in the next few months, I ran several more races and hiked and walked countless miles. My feet continue to hold out and withstand such rigors to this day.

Do I have some magic formula that cures the pain in your feet instantly? Absolutely not. I don't think one exists. But I took information gathered over months and compiled it together into one central source. Everything I could find regarding conservative, non-interventional plantar fasciitis therapy has been included in this book. And I personally used each and every action item listed. I had motivation, believe me. I hated being injured. I wanted to get back into the action. I wanted to walk normally again. I wanted to be able to stand in place without pain. If you're suffering from plantar fasciitis, however mild or severe, you know what I mean.

This book assumes you have begun to experience the symptoms of plantar fasciitis. Tender arches. Pain in your heel, perhaps at the very back of it or where it meets the arch. Maybe in both of these spots, and at the outside edge of your foot as well. And it's at its worst first thing in the morning, lets up a bit as the day goes on, then returns again in the evening. You might be just starting to suspect you have the condition. Or perhaps you are already into a lengthy battle against plantar fasciitis and you are not yet winning. Possibly, you have been trying to tough it out, carrying on with the usual activities and hoping it simply goes away. But it doesn't go away, and the pain persists.

To make matters worse, people close to you have no idea what you're going through. You've described your condition, but they don't seem to get it. How did you acquire it? Well, you're not really sure. It just seemed to come out of nowhere. You don't have a short sound byte to summarize its cause. Your explanation gets long, and they tune out. Maybe they think you sound like a hypochondriac. But the stabbing pain in the morning is real, the limping is real, the return of the soreness in the evening is real. And also real is the fact that you can no longer run or walk like you did, or stand on your two feet for any length of time. Until someone experiences plantar fasciitis, they can't understand the intricacies of your suffering.

If you're hobbled by plantar fasciitis, you naturally want to heal. But how long is the recovery time needed to recuperate from a bout of plantar fasciitis? There is no definite time frame. Your activity level, type of work you do, weight, footwear, age, flexibility, rest periods - or lack of them - between past exercise sessions, and the anatomy of your specific feet can all determine the recuperation time. As can the length of time you've had plantar fasciitis before you started to address it. Some folks recover in a couple of months, some take a year or more.

This brings up an important point. Advice on the subject can vary, but one expert source after another repeats a consistent theme: plantar fasciitis rarely goes away on its own. If you try to ignore it, and keep doing what you did to bring it on in the first place, plantar fasciitis will only get worse. You could develop other maladies as well, such as knee, hip or back conditions, as you change your normal gait to favor the injury. You must face the problem

and take action to alleviate it. Initially ignoring the early symptoms was nearly a catastrophe for me. It added months to my recovery time. I wish I had started the recuperation steps and preventive measures sooner. Instead, I plowed ahead and tried to forget about it, hoping it would just disappear. It didn't. I had an early second chance to recover and I trampled over it. Don't make the same mistake.

Did I mention the silver lining in all of this? The time you spend repairing your ailing feet may bring about some unexpected side benefits. I definitely found this to be true during my plantar fasciitis ordeal.

To maintain some semblance of fitness and prevent weight gain, I turned to alternative exercises in place of running. I unearthed my bicycle, cleaned the cobwebs off, and started to use it again. As soon as I could, I walked more regularly to burn calories. I gradually worked into a humble swimming routine, the first time I had used swimming for exercise in decades. Strength training was easier to work into my routine, and the results seemed to come easier when I wasn't logging so many miles training for the next running race. And last but not least, I buckled down and stretched on a regular basis. My muscles weren't as flexible as I thought they were. Once the stretching routine took effect, daily activities and workouts became easier. And it simply felt good to stretch.

The well-rounded fitness approach I turned to worked muscles in different ways and with an emphasis different from which they had become accustomed. It made me more flexible and gave my system a chance to recover. If you are already an avid runner, hiker, or walker, you may find the switch to a new regimen a welcome change. It may boost your strength and endurance in surprising ways. If you are new to exercise, this may be the jump start you need to venture down a more fit and solid path. In either case, your feet will thank you for it.

Want more good news? The recuperation plan found here will bring immediate improvement to the suffering caused by plantar fasciitis. Will it cure a person of it instantly? That's doubtful. If an instant fix for plantar fasciitis exists, it's not yet been discovered. But you will have less pain, better flexibility, more strength, and a lower chance of re-injury once you start on the steps detailed here. The positive effects will be realized right away. The healing will start right away. Thousands of past sufferers have proven this to be true. Hey, even I was a guinea pig for the cause. I field tested everything contained here, and it saved my feet.