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The Pain Factor

By Louise A. Roach

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Last year I told an acquaintance that at the age of 46, I had taken up running. The reply was, "Oh, that's awfully hard on your knees." At first I was taken aback. Yes, I knew if I didn't stretch, warm-up or wear properly fitted shoes, I might experience pain or an injury. But the person telling me this was overweight, had borderline high blood pressure, and never worked out. I wondered if this friend realized by living a sedentary lifestyle, the odds of developing heart disease, osteoporosis, diabetes and some cancers had substantially increased. Not to mention that being overweight actually placed this person at a higher risk than me for developing knee pain from osteoarthritis and heel pain as a result of plantar fasciitis.

I'm no spring chicken and sometimes my running resembles a dawdling old hen. But I do know it's necessary to take precautions at any age to guard against injury when participating in physical activity such as running. Because the truth is, sometimes pain happens. When it does, you can either use pain as an excuse or you can use it as a diagnostic tool to help improve and go forward with your performance.

There are three classifications of pain. In simple terms, these can be described as the following:

Nociceptive Pain: felt after an injury to body tissues such as cuts, sprains, broken bones, bruising, surgery, and sometimes cancer. Most pain is of this type.

Neuropathic Pain: resulting from an injury to nerves, the spinal cord or the brain, examples being Phantom Limb Pain and shingles - which affects nerve tissue.

Psychogenic Pain: is related to a psychological disorder where the type, intensity or proportion of pain experienced is greater than the injury. Some chronic ailments may be related to this type of pain.

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Pain can also be defined as acute (an immediate response to an injury) or chronic (a pain lasting more than six weeks). The majority of injuries from physical activity fall into the category of acute nociceptive pain. Although some overuse injuries such as Plantar Fasciitis or Runner's Knee can become chronic if not properly treated or allowed enough time to heal. Most injuries to body tissues are minor and can be treated with nonsteroidal antiinflammatory drugs (NSAID), such as ibuprofen, and ice therapy or R.I.C.E. (rest, ice, compression and elevation) to decrease pain. Cuts, bruises, strains, sprains, swelling and inflammation can generally be treated in this way. Severe acute injuries, such as fractured bones and ruptured tendons, should always be treated by a medical professional, as is the case with injuries resulting in chronic, neuropathic and psychogenic pain. If you experience minor pain or inflammation during an activity, this is a good time to evaluate what your body is saying and respond in a positive, strengthening manner. Try asking the following questions: What particular part of my body is affected? Does the pain happen only during a certain activity or is it constant? Am I experiencing pain when running or walking on a certain type of terrain? Is this a new pain or one that has happened before? What measures can I take to correct or strengthen the affected body area?

I used this list of questions to understand a reoccurring pain on the outside of my legs. After a little research and a trip to my local running specialty store, I learned the pain was IT Band Syndrome. The IT Band is a long fibrous muscle, located on the outside of the leg. When it becomes inflamed, pain is felt at a point near the knee joint. I knew the pain usually happened when I was hiking downhill for long periods of time and it went away after a few days of rest. This signified several areas of my body that needed work: weak leg muscles, a tight IT Band, and not enough arch support to stabilize my knee during an activity. I have incorporated the following positive measures to help strengthen my body's weak points: Wearing well-fitted running and hiking shoes with strong arch support. Adding leg strengthening exercises to my daily routine. Wearing neoprene knee braces on a long hike with a lot of downhill climbing. Increasing my daily stretching routine, with particular stretching for the IT Band. Doing stretching and warm-up exercises before a strenuous hike or run. Cross-training: running, walking, hiking, biking, weight lifting and using the elliptical trainer to provide a variety of exercises to all leg muscles. Using ice therapy immediately after a hike if I feel pain. Working up to a strenuous hike by doing shorter hikes on hilly terrain weeks before the big day. Maintaining a normal weight so as not to place added stress on my legs.

Don't let pain, or your fear of it, be a factor in whether or not you are an active person. Not exercising will result in far worse consequences. Use pain as a guide to become a stronger, more aware and healthier person.

Disclaimer: This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical treatment or consultation. Always consult with your physician in the event of a serious injury.

Louise Roach is the editor of on-line health and fitness newsletter, NewsFlash* SnowPack. Ms. Roach has been instrumental in the research, testing and development of a patented ice therapy called SnowPack. Her injury prevention and treatment articles have been published on running, walking and fitness websites. For more information visit:

or NewsFlash*SnowPack at

. Louise Roach can be reached at

How to use your pain to gain

By Nicholas Dixon

Pain. All of us have felt that emotion some time or the other. And most of us fear that heart-wrenching feeling that pain brings. We all have to deal with it, but some people treat it differently.

Successful people recognise and use the value of pain to gain in their lives. Any person who is a success carries with them a lot of pain inside. But what makes them different? Simple. Pain is the only road to true success in life. And that can be personal, business or family.

Athletes are a prime example. To be the best, they have to train and stretch their muscles. This in turn strengthens and builds them which makes them powerful. But to achieve this as you know can be very painful. But, these athletes know that to bear the pain gives them the edge to gain.

Being in a relationship or running a business will set you up for some pain. In business rude people, your fears and unreliable technology will cause you pain. Jealousy, fears, power struggles etc. can burn you in a relationship. But we all have to get over them.

Most people will run from the pain. They are the ones with the stories of dreams that were unfulfilled. But the truth is, the only way to achieve your goal is to go through the pain.

So my friends if this moment you are feeling pain, smile inside. At least you now know even if others don't, it is your path to success. Use it wisely because where there is no pain, there is no gain.

To your success and mine

Nicholas

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Nicholas Dixon is the CEO of Oceanroc Web Consulting. Subscribe to The Roc newsletter @

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