

## Injuries and Rookie Mistakes



My over-enthusiasm for my newly discovered running passion brought with it mistakes and injury. I always wanted to go further than I was ready. That tended to be my nature. My boys still tell stories when they were children about the hikes we went on above our cabin. I would push them too far or take what they called a “Dad short-cut.” They would point to scars on their arms or legs that were a result of one of my adventures.

In 2003, I still wasn’t really a runner, more of a fast hiker or slow trail jogger. But the problems I encountered are many of the same problems new runners encounter. My early injuries were typical rookie runner over-use injuries. The first was Iliotibial band syndrome (ITBS). The IT band on the outside of the knee gets tight and inflamed causing terrible pain that you can’t run through, especially on the down hills. Also I suffered from Patello-Femoral Syndrome (PFS) or Chondromalacia caused by improper tracking of the knee cap. The underside of the knee cap gets terribly bruised causing bad pain, even when sitting for a while with your knee bent. I was plagued by both of these, did take some weeks off, tried to use bands or braces, and then sent ahead and pushed through the pain.

In April 2003, I severely injured my right knee. I believe it probably happened while skiing, but I did not notice it much until the following week on my yearly backpack trip to [Muddy River in the San Raphael Swell](#) in Utah. I felt bad pain behind my knee at the start of the hike and used a brace I had brought to help. I was stupid and even jogged while carrying a 30-pound pack, further aggravating it. By the second day the knee swelled up like a balloon and I was taking far too much Ibuprofen. By the third day I could barely bend my leg and we slowly exited the canyon. I asked my buddies to dump me off at a motel while they four-wheeled the last day in Moab.

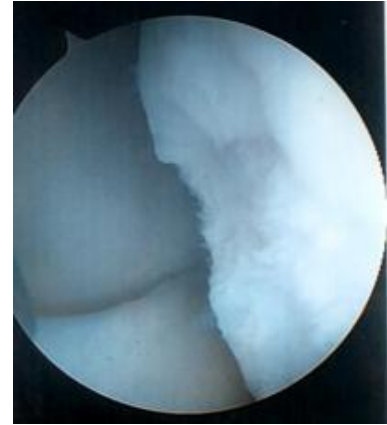


For the next several weeks I made doctor’s visits. I was very anxious to get fixed up so I could resume my running. After an MRI, the verdict was a torn meniscus. The doctor recommended surgery. I agreed and wanted him to perform it as soon as possible to I could resume my activities. I was very hopeful but also concerned that I may have lost my life-changing activities in just six months. I realized that the cause was likely because I was pushing too hard, too fast.

In the Mormon faith we believe in receiving blessings in time of sickness and trial, and we also usually receive them before surgeries. A priesthood holder gave me a blessing the night before my surgery. In the blessing he gave me a promise which I believed was from the Lord that I would fully recover and “would be able to run with great speed.” This gave me hope but also puzzled me because I was slow, just a fast hiker, a slow jogger, not a runner with great speed. That had not been my goal.

When I woke up from the surgery, the doctor came in and explained that it was a good thing that he operated because there was some serious damage. He repaired the meniscus as much as possible but also scraped the underside of my knee cap. I had been damaging the knee cap and it needed smoothing out. He then dropped a bombshell. "You need to give up running." He noticed the expression on my face and then added, "but if you need to because it is really important to you, stick to soft trails." I let out a sigh of relief.

I next entered a period of frustrating recovery. I didn't want to lose the level of fitness I had achieved thus far so I went back to the pool. But the kicking motion loosened the knee badly until I resorted to a knee brace to keep things in place while I swam. I swam 60 miles during these recovery weeks.



Scope picture of part of the injury

Recovery came quicker than expected, however I would feel the after-effects for years. But I learned how to manage and take care of the knee. (Years later I would return to that doctor for my next serious injury and I explained that I had run 23,000 miles on the knee that he had repaired. An MRI showed no new damage to the knee. He then bragged to all his office staff and had me tell them how much I ran.) On the bright side, with the time off, my ITBS was cured and never returned.

I bought trekking poles and learned to use them well. Just two months after surgery, I felt mended enough to resume hiking. With my trekking poles, I again climbed Mount Timpanogos. I was pretty emotional standing on top. I had feared that I would never get up there again.

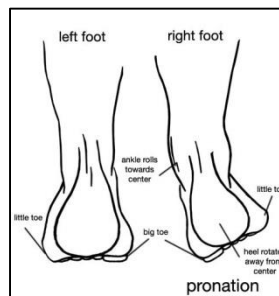
As a rookie, I made plenty of other mistakes. On another run to [Lower Muley Twist](#), going the opposite direction, I entered the wrong canyon and got all turned around. After two hours of running, I came out of the Water Pocket Fold only a mile from my starting point. I solved that by buying a GPS. I didn't want to get lost again.

I failed to understand how bad cotton is to wear while running. I would wear cotton shirts and sweat shirts that would get wet and heavy and make me chilled. On one outing in the Uintas it rained all day and my sweatshirt became so wet and heavy that I had to leave it hanging on a tree. I also wore cotton socks at first and those of course caused bad blisters. I eventually figured out that I should not wear cotton.



The shoes I first used were just cheap running shoes. I believed that the expensive shoes just were not needed. I would go into a sports store and just find something off the shelf that was cheap and felt good. These shoes were bad and it took me another year to understand the great value of using a high quality shoe.

I knew nothing about foot pronation. I never was very likely the cause doctor who gave me and learned to build my

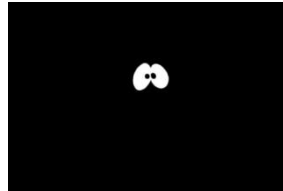


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**Yeah, I have  
a diet...  
It's called  
RUNNING!**  
I ♥ TO RUN.

A big problem early on was learning to eat while running. I would lose my appetite and just stop eating. When I ran with my brother-in-law Ed, I would observe that he would eat a ton. I knew that he was doing the right thing, but it took a while to teach myself to eat during my runs.

Another mistake was during my light runs, just a Walmart. More than once the batteries would run out, much light. It would take me two years to wise up and system that make running at night turn into a joy.



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The packs that I would wear were far too heavy and would bounce around. I eventually switched to waist packs, which I used for a couple years, but would cause abdominal problems. I eventually ditched waist packs for good and bought much better packs made for biking or running.



It took me another year to understand the importance of electrolytes. During another run in Paria Canyon with my brother Bob, I drank mostly straight water even though the last 20 miles were in very hot conditions. When I reached Lees Ferry I was in bad shape and would have to lie by a creek to continually try to lower my body temperature. But I continued to feel ill. As we took a shuttle back to our starting point, I had to have the driver pull over as I threw up violently. Bob knew what my problem was and from then on I appreciated the importance of salt intake during my long runs.

I would at times run out of water and get dangerously dehydrated. During an amazing two-day adventure run in Canyonlands National Park I totally ran out of water and had to drink from little pockets in the slick rock. Thankfully I understood the importance of filtering water or choosing wise water sources and never have had a sickness because of bad water.



Another problem I was experiencing but didn't realize it was hyponatremia, an electrolyte imbalance where my body would retain too much water. I had no idea what this was, didn't know the signs, but as I looked back a couple years later, I understood what was happening at times. For me, the cause was too little electrolytes taken in. Once I learned about electrolytes, I thought I could get what I needed from Gatorade. Not so, for these distances.

Physically I was still too heavy, more than 200 pounds. If I didn't shed more weight, I would still face many injuries. Going further than I should was the biggest mistake and the most common error for new runners. Establishing a mileage base takes time and you have to ease up the miles traveled gradually or you will surely experience over-use injuries or worse.

But my health was improving. I had my cholesterol checked every few months and my levels continued to improve especially my HDL (good cholesterol) that became higher and higher as I lost weight and improved my fitness. I improved my nutrition, watched the calories and started taking supplements. I noticed that I wasn't getting frequent colds any more. Something unexpected, I just didn't need as much sleep as I used to need. I woke up in the morning fresh and excited to exercise.

I rediscovered the joy of listening to music. I started listening to music as I ran and really enjoyed it. My CD collection grew and it still would be a couple years before MP3 players made portable music far easier to take with me on runs.

I finished 2003 running with a total of 566 trail miles, which I thought at that time was a huge number. At first I didn't include any miles I ran on the pavement because to me that wasn't what I was trying to do. For me, it was all about the trails.