

3rd Year Anniversary

“Come on: Who Stretches Before *Going for a Walk?*”

I've always stretched before and after bike rides, running, and lifting weights. But for walking, I'd never thought of it? This past Labor Day, I sustained a partial tear of my Achilles tendon, which was brought on by lack of flexibility. And it had an immediate impact on my exercise, and within a few weeks, my weight!

A year ago, I wrote a letter for [Six Weeks to Wellness](#) about my diet, weight loss, and changing exercise routines. I've made lifestyle changes since my physician told me in March 2006 that I had pre-diabetes.

In late August last year, I was visiting old college pals in Berkeley, California. We spent several days hiking up the coast and touring the waterfront in San Francisco. One morning, I felt like I'd pulled a muscle in my lower leg. The pain was sharp, and unusual. One of my hosts suggested stretching, and the pain diminished. I stretched every day for the rest of my trip.

After I returned to Lansing, the pain was gone, and I quit stretching. In mid-September, that “alligator bite” began to smart again, and over several weeks became worse than it had been in California. My brain had erased the file on stretching. While hobbling to a meeting one morning just before Halloween, the pain was so bad that I stopped and sat down on the State Capital lawn. I telephoned a podiatrist I'd seen years ago. I thought I was simply lucky when he said he'd see me the next day, but he was worried and all business. Not the jovial guy I remembered, but he had reason as he carefully checked my heel. He said I had a partial tear in the tendon, probably caused by not stretching. He said if I didn't immobilize it immediately, it might tear completely, requiring surgery and at least a half year of wearing a cast. His physical therapist strapped my lower leg into a tall velcro boot, said to return in a month, and if I showed progress, we'd *start stretching*.

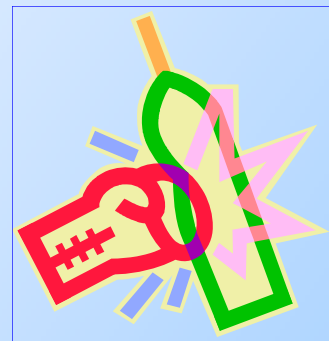
Meanwhile, my weight crept up 12 pounds as daily walks diminished from an hour to a mere ten minutes. The advent of the holidays, office treats, and seasonal feasts didn't help! I like to eat, and I found comfort in old habits to help nurse my injured ego. During this time, a visit to my family doctor revealed my blood sugar was up. He suggested I tame the sugar with more exercise, which was frustrating: walking more than a city block was exhausting. Yet, if there's anything I've learned from this experience of having pre-diabetes and then injuring my heel, it's not to give up! The health data are fairly convincing about being able to reverse pre-diabetes, and that's what I'd done in 2006. The idea of becoming diabetic still worried me enough that I've altered the way I viewed my health, exercise, and even what I think I can do when my leg is strapped into a boot the “size of a school bus”.



I went on-line, talked to colleagues at the state health department where I work, and wrote down any and all new ideas. What could I do? I couldn't swim because I don't belong to a fitness club that has a pool. Walking any great distance was painful. I couldn't spend a month just lifting weights - it's difficult to make it aerobic enough to burn a lot of calories. I might have been able to use a recumbent bike, but I don't own one. And it was getting cold outside anyhow.

Sometime in the next week, I was thumbing through a fitness magazine while nuking one of those delicious low-cal frozen meals for dinner. I was reading about a world karate champion, Joe Lewis, who described key training tips, including his use of a heavy punching bag for both cardio and full-body workouts. Hmm ... I could visualize doing the same thing in my basement.

Twenty years earlier I'd taken martial arts, and had enjoyed working the heavy bag (it doesn't hit back!). A half hour later, I was at a local sports store and bought an eighty-pound bag and a pair of padded gloves. I wrestled the beast to my cellar *very carefully* and suspended it from a double-thick ceiling joist. I cleared space and swept the floor. I stapled up photos of Muhammad Ali and George Foreman. Then I laced up a pair of high-top climbing boots, and set to work. I found I could shuffle - step around the bag. The boots were rigid and protected my heels. I practiced breathing and worked the bag in a series of three-minute rounds. As I got better at smacking the bag with a decent rhythm, I found it was fun; aerobic and anaerobic at the same time. And I retired the big boot in favor of the climbing boots.



Now, as I'm writing this in April 2009, it's good to report that I'm walking normally again, and I'm continuing to stretch every day. The pain's mostly gone. I've returned to the South Beach (SB) Diet, and my weight is back down eight pounds. Walking, weight lifting, the heavy bag, and stretching continue to help. I have my 40th high school reunion in August, and I'm targeting a loss of another fifteen pounds, which is both realistic and would be my lowest weight since I moved to Lansing from Seattle in 1990. These strategies have worked well for me, and the doctor is happy with the improved blood chemistry.

(NOTE: My weight increased from 228 in August 2008 to 240 by Thanksgiving. My weight is back down to 232 pounds since the punching bag came home and I returned to the SB diet and the side-walk. I weigh myself daily, so I can fine-tune the diet. My physician said my all-time high was 278 in 2003, so this overall weight loss has been, and remains, substantial.)

Submitted by Bob Barrie, Michigan Department of Community Health

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