

The Injury Gospel

Injured again—bummer. *Julian Saunders* helps you off the injury treadmill

Thou shalt not crimp, much

Two groups of people crimp: beginners (because it feels stronger), and those who never grew out of it. Two groups of people crimp significantly less: those who naturally evolved, and those who injured themselves crimping. Crimping places much more stress on the pulley apparatus, finger joints, elbows and tendons than open-handing. It feels good though, much stronger, especially on smaller holds. Unfortunately, that does not help your frayed tendon as it washes around in some dark anatomical crevice, dearly missing that to which it was once intimately attached.

So stop it! Not completely, just try crimping less. Over time you will gain strength in an open-hand position, and there is evidence to suggest that open-handing gives you significantly greater endurance—you'll be able to hang on longer.

Spotters: use 'em

People who don't use spotters are very entertaining. You watch, sadistically, not blinking; if they fall it will be a spill worth watching. Even if they don't come off, imagining what could have been is inherently satisfying. These people are also very good for business: a badly rolled ankle can cost you \$500 in manual therapy, not including cash for the surgeon who stitched your ligaments back together and the anaesthetist who saved you from feeling it. Surely the biggest advantage of spotters is that they scream in your ear and refuse to accept you falling off. However, don't underestimate the benefit of being kept upright, thereby saving your ankles, elbows and knees and keeping your head off things that would hurt. A good spotter is a priceless addition to your bouldering kit.

Thou shalt be disciplined in the face of ego

You're a little late to the gym and your homies are firing. They warmed up without you—inconsiderate sods. Discipline wobbling, you begin to warm up, continually glancing over. Their problem looks good and you're sure you could send it easily. Enter the danger zone, where the ego is alpha, discipline is a wallflower and patience is not in the dictionary.

The key to injury avoidance is discipline. This means that if something is hurting, stop! Pain is a great index of the damage you are doing. Better yet, stop when your intuition is flashing red, before you do the damage. In general, pay attention to your own risk evaluation.

The gym

Ninety per cent of my patients injure themselves at the gym. I can't say why but

there do seem to be more injuries for every hour of climbing in an indoor setting. I'm not sure whether this is due to the shorter warm-up, a quicker and more intense pace, the pneumatic holds, or just training overload—perhaps it is the focus on power rather than technique that is the culprit. More than likely it is a combination of all these and more. Whatever the reason, I have nothing more constructive to say than be careful.

Thou shalt become a geriatric gracefully

The flip side of age is wisdom. I got my first instalment a couple of years ago after a series of havoc-wreaking injuries. Until you begin to need this wisdom why pay any attention? There is a marked decline in strength and healing for both men and women once they pass the age of 25. By the time you hit 35 you will surely have noticed. Obviously climbers are still improving in their 30s, and even 40s, after years of training. Why? Because experience and training can outstrip the programmed decline. Getting older just means that you have to be smarter about your training.

Thou shalt not stop and drop

Countless times I have seen people stop climbing after injuring themselves and go into further, more advanced states of disrepair. The body is a finely tuned machine. Because it works so well most of the time and generally fixes itself when it doesn't, we tend not to appreciate its delicate homeostasis. Injuring a tissue such as a tendon is one thing; altering the complex balance of opposing forces in multiple muscles and ligaments by allowing them to weaken rapidly is often beyond what the body can cope with in the short term. A little well-structured activity can help to keep you sane and slow down this decompensation, and will also help you get back to your previous level faster.

Breadboards and rest days

One rest day in the Grampians a friend of mine decided to break some breadboards, just for fun. He is well trained in the field but another friend of mine who is rather less qualified decided he would do it too. Boys will be boys—pathologically so when everybody wants to be the alpha male. Suffice to say bones were broken and one of my friends didn't climb for a while.

The moral is that rest-day activity is a good thing if it's constructive. A run might serve you better than a punch. Moreover, if you want to climb the next day, structure your rest-day activity so that you will not

be completely debilitated (or disarticulated).

If you have children more than ten years old, don't try to follow their example

The bare truth is that kids have the element of youth, but it might as well be the elixir of life. Either way, you don't have it. If for some reason you do get a little of the 'just let me show you what I can do' mentality, be prepared to be humbled and possibly broken. Every middle-aged generation looks at what the youthful body can do and shakes its collective head in disbelief. Let's just leave it at shaking your head rather than breaking your neck.

Don't walk around the crag too much

Climbers are inherently good at climbing. However, an enhanced ability in the vertical realm seems to erode your skills in the horizontal one. Admittedly, the bottom of the cliff can be a treacherous obstacle course of rocks and packs, slopes and ropes. The most common way to roll your ankle is not falling off a boulder problem, but walking to it.

Rest and recoup

If you climb and/or train all year round, it is a good idea to have some time off—structure is up to you. A few weeks off twice a year, or a season of something else, will enable your body to recover from the chronic stresses of climbing.

Eat properly

Having two peas, four grains of rice and a sniff of a Mars Bar wrapper is a 1990s thing—the 1980s equivalent is Mike Law in pink tights. You must move on before your bone density drops and the dieting pages become essential reading. Dieting can lead to weight loss but also lowers your metabolism and causes lethargy. Looking like a rack of bones will not help your climbing, and it certainly won't help you in the mating stakes.

Variety is the spice of life

A broad-based training programme will help to spread the load on your body and develop good technique in a variety of climbing situations. You, too, can learn how to fall off crimps, slopes, pockets and slabs; how to be shredded by granite, manicured by sandstone and be-mused by limestone. The more you fall off, the more you will learn. 

Osteopath by trade, charismatic bondage queen by night, *Julian Saunders* has helped many. For more information check the classifieds in *Rock* or the personals column in your local newspaper.