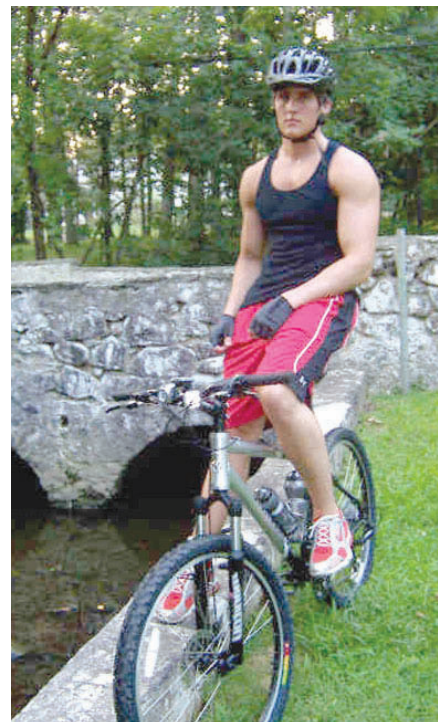


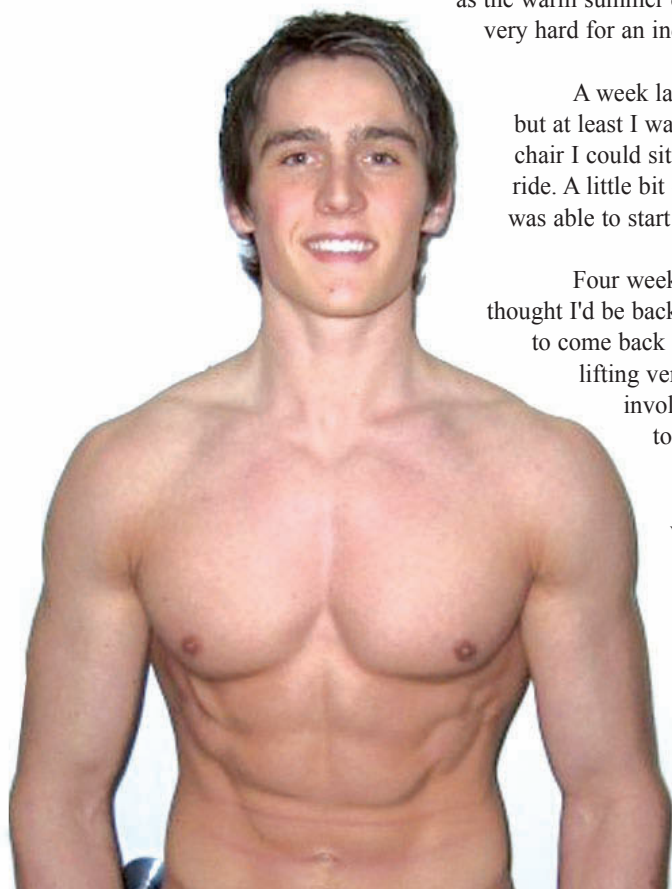
Dealing with **Healing**

By *Nicholas Gray*

On a beautiful summer's day in late July, I was lounging by the pool at my apartment reading this very magazine. In that issue was an article by a guy who was so dedicated to the weight room he didn't want to participate in other physical activities, at the risk of an injury that could keep him out of the gym. While I admire and share his dedication, my mindset is completely different. I enjoy all types of sports and activities that get me moving. Generally this complements my overall fitness routine. Ironically, however, on this particular day it would have a disastrous effect. Early that same evening, a mountain biking accident left me with a broken collarbone and severe road rash from my shoulder down to my hand. The following weeks and months proved tough, both physically and mentally. Hopefully this account of my rehabilitation will be of help to any of you recovering from a serious injury.



A few days after the accident, I had an appointment with an orthopedic doctor, who told me to keep my upper body still and come back in a month. No working out, or even driving for that matter. This was like a jail sentence to me. Heck, I couldn't even dress myself. I became very depressed at the thought of my hard earned muscle wasting away. I had a lot of time to dwell on my situation, as the pain was so severe I was not able to go to work for a week. My attitude turned negative as I was forced to lie on the couch in front of the TV as the warm summer days passed. I also had to be completely dependent on others, which is very hard for an independent person.



A week later I returned to my desk job. It was quite painful to sit upright all day, but at least I was out of the house. At this point I decided that if I could sit in an office chair I could sit on an exercise bike. That evening I returned to the gym for a short ride. A little bit of exercise somewhat subdued my frustration. After another week I was able to start some light machine work with my legs.

Four weeks after the accident my collarbone was fusing back together. Initially I thought I'd be back in action by this point, but I was still a long way off. The doc told me to come back in another month. In the meantime, I was mercifully allowed to begin lifting very light weights with my arms. No shoulder movement could be involved. At this point I began riding my bike again, being very careful not to fall, as this would mean a certain re-break.

Muscle atrophy was now very evident. My favorite t-shirt was still pretty snug on my left side, but on the right it looked a couple sizes too large. A trip to the scale revealed that I had lost twelve pounds. Over the next couple weeks there were times when I thought I would be fine to stray from the doctor's orders and push myself. Every time, this proved to be a poor decision. Thankfully I never made the injury worse. I decided to start listening.

Two months after my injury, another trip to the doctor's office finally gave me some good news. The bone was looking good. I thought the all-clear was finally coming. Not quite. At this point the doctor did tell me I could do pretty much all exercises, the only exceptions being squats, shrugs, and pulldowns, as they

would place too much strain on the bone. However, all exercises had to remain light. He told me to do this for one more month, at which point I could start going heavy again. I decided to take a look at this advice optimistically. I could use the next month to tone up, get back a little muscle, and prepare my body to begin lifting again. During this time I became very encouraged. My muscle memory kicked into high gear and my body quickly began to retake its prior form.

By mid-November I was lifting heavily once again, more than three months after my injury. I'm very pleased with the way my body has responded. My strength and size are quickly coming back. This time has been very trying, but strangely rewarding in another sense. I now have a great appreciation of my time in the gym, and even more so of good overall health.

Here are some things I've learned from this experience:

- **Always wear a helmet when riding a bike! Had I not been wearing mine I wouldn't be writing this now. My helmet was destroyed in the crash.**
- **Manage your expectations. Serious injuries take a lot of time to heal.**
- **Listen to your doctor and don't try to rush the process.**
- **Leave your pride at home. Don't be worried that you're only lifting 20% of what you usually would. The important thing is that you're back in the game and making a comeback.**

- **Be thankful for those around you who are willing to help you through the adversity. My wife was fantastic throughout this entire ordeal and I am forever grateful.**
 - **Most importantly, maintain a positive attitude. While this is the most difficult thing to do, nothing will be more beneficial to your recovery.**
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