

exclusive

Ghost on the Mountain

Inside John Harlin's Quest to Climb the
Deadly Peak that Killed His Father

★ THE MAKING OF THE IMAX MOVIE

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INSIDE: A STRONGER BACK // PERFECT POSTURE // THE LAB RAT GETS GAME READY, AND MORE

PHOTOGRAPH BY SAM JONES

Part 1
The Owner's Manual:

Your Back

The Spinal Frontier

Rule number one for total physical fitness? Where your back goes, all else follows. Keep yours in top shape with our guide to strength, flexibility, and injury treatment.

BY RYAN BRANDT



UP NEXT MAY: YOUR EYES // AUGUST: YOUR HEART // NOVEMBER: YOUR DIET

Chill Out

Our aching Lab Rat tests the world's most expensive ice pack **BY NICK HEIL**

Winter arrived, and its bitter winds bore multiple injuries: Turned my ankle in a late-season soccer game, bashed my knee against a rock during a backcountry ski tour, tweaked my back on a trail run. Then came my high-speed yard sale on a beginner's run in Colorado, during which I cantilevered facefirst into the slope with such force it broke my goggles, wrenched my right shoulder, and whiplashed my body into what contortionists call a "scorpion"—a highly unnatural backbend in which your feet wrap over your head and touch the ground.

Staying upright—much less fit—was becoming a daily war of attrition. Since I was spending so much time nursing sprains and strains, I invested in my own personal rehab wonder. A 26-year-old Swedish masseuse named Brigitta? Alas, no. I got a Game Ready.

Game Ready (gameready.com) is a portable device about the size of a toaster oven. It pumps ice water and air through a variety of articulated cuffs that fit over injured body parts—ankles, knees, back, shoulders, etc. In essence, it's a high-tech update on RICE (rest, ice, compression, elevation), offering a few distinct advantages over a bag of frozen peas. Game Ready's cuffs Velcro snugly over odd-shaped body parts; they inflate like a blood-pressure sleeve to combine compression with penetrating cold; and they don't turn warm and mushy after 20 minutes.

Originally developed by NASA to help cool space suits, the technology migrated into therapeutic application in 1998 for treatment of acute injuries. Since then, it's become a staple in training rooms, physical-therapy clinics, and, more recently, private homes. (But it requires serious soreness to warrant your own personal unit—expect to pay about \$2,500, depending on the joint wraps needed.)

Trainers and therapists have long appreciated the value of cold for treating injuries, since it's the swelling that contributes most to pain, slow recovery, and scar tissue. "A common denominator in almost all outdoor-sports injuries is joint swelling," says Jeremy Rodgers, 33, a certified athletic trainer at the Colorado Sports Chiropractic Center, in Louisville, Colorado. "From a rehab standpoint, if you can control that swelling, that's the number-one predictor of a good outcome."

It was a no-brainer to use Game Ready on my ski-wrecked shoulder. But I soon discovered another blessed application: routine workout recovery, especially for my lower back, which, since I'm a slouching desk dork most of the week, was agitated after almost every run. The therapeutic potency of cold and compression worked miracles—my back was usually pain-free by the next day. My shoulder took a week to recover, but that was a lot better than three weeks. And no visits to my local rehab clinic required; I could ice several times a day while watching HBO from the couch. I even asked the Game Ready folks if they were going to make a full-body suit, which made them laugh—momentarily.