

The Primal Blueprint Podcast – Episode #37: Listener Questions and Answers with Mark Sisson

Mark Sisson is back in the Malibu studios for a free-form conversation with Brad Kearns about Mark's latest fitness pursuits, recent developments and new products in the Primal Blueprint business, and the importance of balancing stress and rest when exercising.

Mark mentions that there is likely a holistic fix for virtually any overuse injury. He talks about how he has modified his gym weight lifting regimen and offers some stretching techniques to improve compromised joints. Mark also discusses how to modify exercise patterns based on sub par immune function and not being in the right headspace for an intense effort. He mentions a new comprehensive online multimedia educational program called Don't Just Sit There, where he works together with Katy Bowman, MS, author of Move Your DNA, to help combat the problem of excessive stillness and lack of variation in the modern workplace. Mark also mentions the general trend of Primal Blueprint Publishing transitioning away from chopping down trees to print hard copy materials to delivering multimedia digital educational products instead.

Mark explains how digital products broaden the educational experience, allow users to personalize their learning process, and make learning more affordable. Furthermore, as in the example of the Primal Blueprint Expert Certification, the course material can be updated seamlessly to stay current and progressive. Also in development are a course on all aspects of effective sprinting and an anti-aging course from both Mark and Carrie Sisson. Furthermore, Mark is working on the third edition of the bestselling Primal Blueprint (hardcover release 2009, paperback release 2011, and a third paperback edition coming in 2015).

Topic timestamps:

Biomechanical fix for injury: 2:50

Working gym equipment differently: 5:20

Modify routine and balance: 8:13

Okay to have down time: 12:22

Mark's example of NYC marathon: 14:53

"Don't Just Sit There": 18:15

Certification course: 25:49

Primal Blueprint update: 25:08

Sprint course: 26:22

Brad Kearns: Welcome. It's Brad Kearns here with our favorite guest, Mark Sisson, back in the studio. It's been a while, Mark.

Mark Sisson: It has been a while but I am ready to hit some questions and bring the audience up to speed on what we have been doing.

Brad: So, okay. We have put out over-thirty proper *Primal Blueprint* podcasts as well as the wonderful direction with the Mark's Daily Apple narrated post. So we are filling that pipeline pretty well.

Mark: Yes I am pleased with that. It provides the listener an opportunity to get some fresh information from my guests and me and also for other listeners who want to listen to an MDA blog post narrated rather than having to read it at work. It is a great opportunity to catch up on all of Mark's Daily Apple stuff.

Brad: Yeah, and I'm reading so much during the day that I feel that sometimes I fall behind because I just don't have any more energy to read for my leisure and for my education at Mark's Daily Apple. So I am a huge devotee of Brock Armstrong. We'll put out a plug to him. He's reading the posts, not only every week

but, picking out some great highlights and going back in to the archives, of..... how many posts do we have in the archives?

Mark: Oh, my God!!.....4000?

Brad: Yes so we are picking out the best of Mark's Daily Apple and that will be titled as such if you want to pick out those, as well as the highlights of the relevant posts of the week. Not the recipes or the things that don't lend themselves to audio but that is part of the channel, too. And then we have our regularly occurring Primal Blueprint podcasts which are titled accordingly and on the blog of Primal Blueprint.com website which is where you can ask a question if you'd like to get it on to the show.

Mark: I was a long time coming to this podcast concept because I didn't because I hadn't incorporated it into my own life and now that I am spending a lot more time with my headphones on listening to other podcasts as part of my research, I get that that is a very convenient way to be given some information that you would otherwise would not have access to.

Brad: We have put out about 35 podcasts that I have gone back to listen to. Much of the content is being threaded into the Cert Course that we are going to talk about in a second. We have also been talking off mike about how you have answered so many questions and you have said so much and covered so much ground. So today I thought we would just kind of freelance a little bit and do some open mike and talk about the latest things that are on your mind. Sometimes we go off the air with the formal show and we get to talking about little asides that I think are interesting to the listeners. Just yesterday you were talking about your latest fitness pursuits and setbacks.

Mark: [00:02:51] It has come to mind again, even though I have learned this lesson many times over, that for every injury that I have incurred over my career, there is probably a simple biomechanical fix. And even though I have gone in to see orthopedists and other specialists and have gotten MRIs and scans and X-rays and have suggestions of surgeries, and other modalities like that, the bottom line is that I keep coming back to this idea that there is a way to fix most injuries that aren't traumatic through some manipulation of range of motion, stretching, or whatever. You yesterday told me about your cure for your plantar fasciitis that had plagued you for years and you podiatrist showed you a two-minute stretch to hold and lo and behold you did that and it soon it went away. A similar thing happened to me. My shoulders have been bothering me for years and I thought it is part of getting old and because I am trying to do too much at my age of 61 now. I am playing Frisbee every week with these young guys and I am paddling for two hours pretty hard. I am having fun while I am doing it but it is a hard workout.

Brad: By the way, those "young guys" does not mean 43-year-old guys. It means guys that show up at the field on Sunday with college gear on from the college athlete team that they play for like tough football players and so on down the line with 22-year-old absolute rock solid studs. Mark shows up and he is assigned to guard one of these fools.

Mark: It is challenging, to say the least. At some point things break. I get minor injuries. The shoulder thing which has been really aggravating over the years, because I have been in the gym and I have been doing whatever I could do in the gym to work around these things. One of the reasons I got my initial shoulder problem is just trying to do too many pull-ups, for instance, or too many lifts in one single plane of motion. Even though we have the primal central movements and pull-ups and lifts are essentially derivations of that, I got to the point where I was trying to do too much.

[00:05:20] Recently, it is really weird, I went to South Beach in Florida. I stayed in a hotel down there and I was in the hotel gym and was trying to work my way through a brand new set of equipment that I had never seen. I am not really equipment minded. I try to do body weight stuff. I try to do pushups, pull-ups, lunges, squats, dips, things like that. But anyway, I am on this piece of equipment and this guy who hardly spoke any English came up to me and said "No, no, no..." and he started to plug.....I had about 80 pounds of weight on a piece of apparatus and he plugged it in to 20. He said, "No...do these. Do these." And what he was showing me, instead of doing 8 to 12 reps of this heavy weight; he was doing 50 repetitions of a much lighter weight. There is a rationale for that. But what he was doing was every time he did a repetition; his

hands were in a different location on the equipment. So if there is an overhead press machine, his hands were close together. His hands were wider. His palms were up. His palms were down. His arms were wide enough that they were on the outside of the equipment as he did them. Every repetition was different. What he was doing is working through all the entire range of plane of motion of the shoulder for instance for an overhead press. So he did 50 repetitions of this.

I thought I am going to try that when I get home. For the last couple of months I have been doing this routine where I go in and I do 50 repetitions on this one piece of equipment but my hands are never in the same position repeated twice in any configuration so that I am working through all these planes of motion for my shoulders. I do a push and I do a pull. So I might do an overhead press and then I might do a pull down machine like a lat pull machine that emulates pull-ups. But when I am doing a lat pull, I am doing it in close. I've got palms forward. I got palms out. I got my arms all the way out. I've got them on the outside bars of the equipment. I am not even close to the grips on the equipment. I will do 50 repetitions of that. I will do 50 pulls and 50 push. Then I will go back and do 50 pull and 50 push and then I will go back and do 50 pulls and 50 push and then I move on to another two sets of equipment and work opposing muscle groups. My shoulders have never felt better. It is just bizarre to me that that was sort of the cure for I thought was going to be a life long shoulder problem. And by the way, which was also one of the reasons one of the orthopedists I talked with suggested that maybe we should get in there and you have a torn labrum and a divot on the glenoid process and that divot is sitting in the joint in the middle of your shoulder. You have biceps tendonitis and you have bursitis. Everybody has these things that show up.

Brad: [00:08:13] You remind me of [????????????????Kenilworth??] man, the recent discovery of the 9000-year-old guy up in the Seattle area and his body was littered with serious injuries. He had a stone spear tip imbedded in his thighbone and so on and so forth. I agree that nobody is perfect. You can work through these things if you modify your routine.

Mark: The answer is really that there is a solution. You just have to find what it is for you. I keep coming back to this time and time again. The original solution for that shoulder problem that gave me 80 percent of my relief was a simple stretch and it was weird. It was a pectoral stretch because the pec pulls the shoulder forward, if you do pec centric exercises....again, a lot of pushups, a lot of fly work that develops the pecs but also pulls the whole shoulder in and out of alignment. Now most recently...this is within the last 24 hours, I had a little bit of Achilles tendonitis. A little issue of tenderness from sprinting on the weekend and you showed me that 2-minute stretch. And today, I swear to God, I woke up.....I did it a couple of times yesterday....I did it once before I went to bed last night. I woke up today and my Achilles feels better than it has felt in a couple of weeks.

My job at Mark's Daily Apple and with the Primal Blueprint and all the stuff that we do is to look for solutions to problems that people have with their physical ills or their dietary issues or whatever and it never ceases to amaze me how the solution is a simple one that you can do yourself that does not involve surgery. Whether it is orthopedic surgery or whether it is bariatric surgery in the case of somebody with dietary issues or whether it is taking drugs. Whatever prescribed medication you have been given to fix or address the symptoms but not fix the actual pain.

Brad: Speaking of simple solutions, there is another thing we should discuss with any injury and this is easier said by a triathlete, but when I was a runner, I was never not injured from high school on through college when I bombed out as my career was over at a young age and then when I was a triathlete for the next twelve years, I was never injured for more than a week or two at a time because when an ache or pain came up, I just switched sports. Like I say it is easier for a triathlete to do that. If my shoulder started throbbing, I wouldn't swim for two days. I would bike and run harder. I think the average person out there will push through these strong signals of pain and disorder and continue on in the name of I don't know what when it is as simple as (a) don't introduce any additional pain to an injured area or you are going to pay for it somewhere down the line, and (b) then you can go and investigate ways to speed the healing and stretch or balance out your muscular balances that are trending toward these injuries.

Mark: Yes. It comes back to that old concept that we tend to get into a rut, a routine, get into a single plane of motion. If you are a runner, you are running in one plane all day long and then even though you are

relative fit, even though you try to get into a basketball game or a soccer game or a Frisbee game as an endurance athlete....

Brad: Or a water-ski pull for 32 seconds....

Mark: you get injured and sometimes badly because you haven't developed just that simple ability to go side to side. So what does that say to that Primal Blueprint/Mark's Daily Apple? I insist that the more you can vary your routine, vary your workout, vary your planes of motion through which you take your body on a regular basis, whether it is workout to workout, or day to day the more resistant to injury you will be in addition to being fitter. And then, in addition, you will be probably healthier because a lot of this has to do with the lower back, for instance. You sit in a chair all day and that is not good for you and standing at a desk all day is similarly not necessarily good for you. There is a middle ground in between.

Brad: [12:22] Well, we are going to talk about "Don't Just Sit There" which is on the verge of release. We are so excited about that. I want to talk about the variation of your routine or exercises like you were doing different positions on the bar, but also, the scheduling and the variation of your workout patterns and being comfortable with, for example, I finished up August and I tried to write down what workouts I had been doing. I looked at it after August was over and saw this was way more exercise and more hard workouts than I usually do. Maybe I should back off. I felt like crap this whole month and I have done very little for the last 20 days. I am totally fine with it because I know I have made fitness breakthroughs in August. I wasn't even noticing and then my body itself said, "Hey, it's time to back off." I think people fail to recognize the importance of variation on so many levels including just being comfortable with great periods of time when you are exercising more enthusiastically and performing better and then being okay with down time for example a winter period when you body should naturally slow down.

Mark: We call that [????????????????] or periodized training in the athletic world where you sort of ramp up certain levels of fitness but when you achieve a new level of fitness, you give your body an opportunity to, not just adapt to it, but recover from what it took to get there. You can utilize that principle as a guideline through a full year's cycle, but you can all do it month to month. I happen to sometimes do it day to day. People are always laughing at me because I will show up some days at the gym and I'll do two exercises and I'll turn around and go home. People ask me, "What is happening?" I will explain I am just not into it today. They say it's showing up is 80 percent, but that is not how it works. I am willing to go back and call it a day and just go home and go back to work and do whatever it was that I was going to do and not feel guilty about it because I was very consciously trying to get into the headspace to be able to complete the workout. But the fact was that I couldn't get into that space, or I didn't have the energy, or I wasn't motivated, or it was a nagging little twinge, or some little thing in the back in my mind telling me to take it easy today. Call this a rest day. No harm. No foul. Better than plowing through a workout and hurting yourself or setting yourself back even more.

[00:14:53] One good example of that was in my career as a runner. The New York Marathon in 1979, a long time ago, I was certain that I was ready to run 2:14 and I went into that race the last six weeks of training and I hammered myself. I was doing 115 miles a week of training and I was going to the track and I was doing 16 halves at 2:24 with a quarter jog in between.

Brad: Was that hard?

Mark: I couldn't do one of those now. I felt like I had done the work. I woke up the morning of the race and I remember feeling like, "Wow! I don't have it today. This is not good but I am here. I trained and I am going to do it. I got to the starting line and I crossed the Verrazano Bridge. I should have dropped out, because I didn't have it. I tried to hold it together and so the first convenient place to drop out was Central Park at 16 miles and what that did was....doing that race set me back. I should have stayed in the race. It cost me six weeks of training.

Brad: You are lucky it only cost you six weeks. Some people are just buried in a hole they never come out of. I think we have spoken about this before. I have a hard and fast rule that I learned the hard way. If you have a slight tickle in your throat when you wake up or you feel kind of hot, or some other sign of

suboptimal immune function, I believe strongly that you should engage in total rest. Some people will say, "If it is below your head stay in bed." No.....if you don't feel like working out and you have an immune problem you just rest because the athlete or the fit person's immune system is markedly better than an average person or it is tremendously worse if they are in an overtraining place. They are going to get sicker and more rundown than even the average person in the office or the workplace or whatever. So paying attention to those signs and learning from Mark Sisson's mistake at the NYC Marathon. If you feel like crap in a marathon, drop out before mile 16.

Mark: I have seen that happen with really strong elite athletes who say, "Well, I have never dropped out of a race. I am not dropping out of a race.' You see them do it,

Brad: [Clapping} Congratulations. You have never dropped out. I'll give you a pat on the back.

Mark: You see it. Just that experience of realizing I didn't have it that day, and instead of calling it a day and going back and recovering and regrouping, it will cost them two months of training.

Brad: It depends what your goals are. If you just want to finish. There are a lot of people out there that state that as their goal. "I just want to get through this Ironman. That is my goal." We could do it right now if we put a gun to your head. You could still run a marathon.

Mark: I used to say I could train a fit 60-year-old woman who had never done one to go a sub-16 Ironman on a bet. But going fast is a different issue.

Brad: Nothing wrong with having a goal just to finish. But it should be finishing and preparing for it in a healthy manner rather than just dragging an injured body through it.

Mark: [00:18:15] All right...enough of this. We are beating ourselves up about here.

Brad: You did mention on the topic of variation, we have a huge major issue in the workplace today. We are doing something about it.

Mark: We have been working on this project for six months with Katy Bowman who is an amazing physical therapist and PhD in kinetics and kinesiology and all matter of body movement. It really contemplated to craft for yourself the perfect workspace that allows you to literally not succumb to sitting disease. There is a lot more that goes in to it besides just the stand up desk. I learned that from here early on that there were so many different things that we do in our lives that we think are the answer. "Well, I went from sitting all day to standing all day and now my back hurts." Well, there is a reason for that because you are in the same position. We have put together a multimedia program called "Don't Just Sit There." It is pdf book and an audio version of that pdf book. How many videos did we put together finally?

Brad: It is going to be about eight videos including that lengthy discussion with you and Katy about all manner of importance a bout movement variation and daily life.

Mark: It is a digital product that is going to be available in about a month or six weeks. The interesting thing here is that we are sort of moving *Primal Blueprint Publishing* away from old school tree based printed material to as much digital only that we can deliver but in a very entertaining and informative package that includes, as I say, pdf, audio versions, pictograms, videos, whatever we can provide that gives a multi media approach to whatever issue it is that we are discussing.

Brad: Well, I have to say that in the last six or seven years we have been very intensely cutting down trees and publishing books. The quote from Jeff Bezos, the head of Amazon, has been haunting me in the back of my mind when he said, "Books have had a great 600 year run but now that run is coming to an end." He meant that everything was going to go in that digital direction because it is so much simpler. I think for the enthusiasts, it is going to be a great step up from just reading a book from Mark or book from Katy in this "Don't Just Sit There" course showing you the stretches that are being described and going through a step by step protocol where you can take action with a video guide, in addition and supplementing, of course, getting the reading material into your brain.

Mark: Right. It is a whole different dimension. And it also lends itself to very specific issues, as opposed to a book that you have to fill 250 to 400 pages with a lot of information and research and background and anecdotes and testimonials and everything. And yet, the reality of most books is....and I used to say this about the *Primal Blueprint*, is that I can tell you everything you need to know to be eating right and sleeping right and getting enough sun in two pages, but because of the nature of books and the perceived value of a printed tome and how much you spend, again, there is an assumption that you have to provide way more information than the end user really wants to know. Well, with digital programming with pdf and an audio book and with videos, you can really dig deeply into one specific issue and provide as much nuance and layers to that issue as possible, and do so in a way I think the user derives benefit. They get a chance to hear it if they are an audible learner. If they are a visual learner, they can read it. If you are an audio/visual learner you can see it on the screen. I think the message really hits home much more clearly.

Brad: It allows for the individualization of the experience because, as you said, you have different learning modalities as well as the pace that you want to learn. And your attention span, which I have to say from my representative sample, my population of pals and even my kids....people are not sitting down and enjoying books like they used to. There is only a small population now would beg to differ...congratulations to them. My son is not inclined to sit and read things about sports like I do but he knows every single thing going on in the NBA without reading it. I ask, "How did you know that?" It was on YouTube or the Smart Phone alert and so the information comes and the educational experience is delivered in a way that you can pick and choose. So the videos are on this course, when you log into the portal....just like with the Certification course, you visit the video of your choice. It might be video Number 7, even though we recommend going in order. You don't feel like it? Hit the video...see the stretching exercises and then come back at your leisure and go through a course more sequentially.

Mark: Yes, I think this is going to be the way to sort of appealing to the shorter attention span of everybody in general, and I include myself in that. We are excited about that. We think that is where *Primal Blueprint* is headed.

[00:23:49] You mentioned Certification. We have already had several hundred people sign up for Certification. The testimonials we are getting on our questionnaires afterwards are really really encouraging to us because people love that course. It is not easy.

Brad: Dare say, that is a feedback form that we ask the graduates to put in and then rate the course, or did you find the course *easy to use, very easy, very difficult*. They always click easy to use. In other words, the course was *easy to use*. Others ask how they could say that. We have heard from MDs, Periodontists, Physical Therapists and every last one of them have said the course is rigorous and definitely worth the value of the experience and they have also given us some really nice precise feedback in areas where we can improve and challenging some of the test questions they didn't feel were fair and so we sit back and reason and try to continue to improve the course. Another plug for the digital transition is you wrote the *Primal Blueprint* in 2008 and it is 2014 now where there are updates about this topic and that topic. In fact you are doing that right now but on digital it is so much easier to make the corrections and updates.

[00:25:08] Tell me about the *Primal Blueprint* update.

Mark: Well, we are hoping to put out a third edition some time in 2015 where we take the new information that has come down since the original book was written and since the updated version was put on in paperback. We are just bringing everybody up to speed. The good news is that not much has changed. It gives me so much satisfaction to realize that we have covered so much in the original *Primal Blueprint*. But back to the Certification. The good thing about Certification and the delivery of that system is that it is malleable. When you print a book and you print 20,000 copies. Those 20,000 are literally cast in stone or cast in print. You can't go back and edit those. With the Certification, every time we get a little nuanced change or something like that, we can go back in and upgrade the course without having to print a lot of material because it is an entirely on line digital course.

Brad: Good thing especially long term is the costs of providing the education are much lower so everybody gets more efficient.

[00:26:22] We have other projects in development. One is the Sprint Course that is pretty exciting because it seems like you get many questions about that from writing in and even for the podcasts. It is sort of an intimidating subject to sprint for someone who has never done that in his or her life.

Mark: That is at the pinnacle or the apex of the *Primal Blueprint* Exercise Pyramid is sprinting. Sprint once a week. I know you advocate for once every seven to ten days. I try to do it once a week. Carrie tries to do it twice a week. That also depends on how aggressively you go after it. But I think, in my wife's case, she has seen incredible benefits. Carrie is wickedly fit anyway. She is....

Brad: She is featured on the Sprint video as a success story.

Mark: She is someone who has always been conscious of working out. She has always worked out not just aggressively but on a daily basis it has been part of her routine. We met in the gym. We met a Sports Club LA twenty-six years ago.

Brad: It is a nice gym. Not a dive. At least they got that going for them.

Mark: Yes so she has always been fit but it wasn't until she started sprinting a few years ago that her fitness level jumped an entire notch. She has always had a great body but her body changed. It became even more firm than it was and it's a noticeable difference to her. These are minor differences to people who are already fit. It is significant enough. My point being anybody and everybody can benefit from injecting some form of sprinting activity in their weekly routine. Now it doesn't have to be sprinting on a track. That is sort of a point that you make. Number 1, we want to show people how to run/sprint on a track or on the grass or on the sand and do so in a way that maximizes the utility of that experience that optimizes their foot landing that optimizes their biomechanics so they get everything right and don't hurt themselves. There are so many other ways you can sprint. There is the bike. I do some of my sprints on a Lifecycle in the gym because it is handy and low impact and I can recover quickly from that. Some people use an elliptical machine. Some people might do jump rope fast for your sprint routine. There are all manner of ways you can sprint but the concept is simple. The concept is do something all out high intensity, relatively low impact, something that raises your heart rate as high as you can get it anywhere from 20 seconds to a minute and several times during one session and do that just once a week. Basically you are done.

Brad: We did a whole podcast on that and it is great to listen to and get inspired now for a reasonable price, it is not a huge investment, you are going to have a librated video at your disposal forever to go watch the actual workouts taking place and learn the techniques and all that. There are no more excuses for not including sprinting in the routine.

Mark: Right. Part of that video package, for instance, is what people pay \$1000 to go to PrimalCon for and one of the most popular sessions at PrimalCon is the Sprint session. Even seasoned runners who have been running their whole life will come up to me after the Sprint session and say, "Holy Crap! I had no idea that I was how you sprint. I had not idea I was running wrong. Now I feel I can go home and with this skill and inject that style into all the other running that I do." It is basically one of the most popular aspect of Primalcon...one of the breakout sessions at Primalcon.

Brad: There are many other ideas partially in development or many other ideas of following this template and following this comprehensive multi media course. Right now, however, it seems like all of us our laser focus on the Certification program because it is so comprehensive and it has been three years in the making and the response has been great.

Mark: The response has been so great and it is getting the major part of our attention right now. The response has been overwhelming and it has been really well received. One of the really gratifying things is that the numbers of international students that we have had take the course. It is a huge number of people from around the world who want to know more about the *Primal Blueprint*. This seems to be a way

to get that education and test themselves and prove to themselves that I really do understand how this point of view, this lifestyle, this *Primal Blueprint* thing works.

Brad: And right now, Mark, it is almost one o'clock here in Malibu so I am guessing you have been fasted for about sixteen so we are going to go have some lunch. I enjoyed the casual format of this podcast and I also have in my back pocket many questions that have been backed up. I thought maybe at the next podcast we could do some short answer style questions. We have had some feedback coming in about those lengthy answers where he explains everything are wonderful and some feedback saying can we cover more questions. So if your average answering time is seven minutes on a question I hope you enjoy that format but I hope we can do a more rapid fire like word association podcast for next time. For now it is Brad Kearns with Mark Sisson in the Malibu studio. Thanks again for listening to the podcast.