

## 2.77 Seek and Geek #4: Kinesio Tape



I go to physical therapy twice a week to rehab from a surgery that I had last year. At the end of each session, they always apply Kinesio Tape to my foot/ankle to reduce pain and inflammation. The first time the therapist put the tape on me, he told me it should last four days. I thought, *Sure, if I don't shower or work out in four days.* He assured me that it was fine to shower.

Let me explain my skepticism. I got my foot taped for practice every day for three years before finally giving in to surgery. Although athletic tape helped manage the pain of my injury, it brought on plenty of other unpleasant consequences. During every preseason I had to go through a series of blister-ception on my heel (see photo below) before redeveloping calluses that could hold up to the tape. At the beginning of each practice it felt like a circulation- and movement-restricting cast (it was bulky too), and after two hours the sweat and movement had loosened it enough that it was no longer an effective support. To remove it I had to use what looks like a giant letter opener (we call it a “shark”) to slice it off. It felt like peeling off a giant Band-Aid.

Kinesio Tape feels like everything that athletic tape is not. It is thin and easily fits into any sock, shoe, or pair of pants. Throughout the day I can't even feel that it's there. It is flexible and sticks to the skin at every point, which means that it does not rub and produce painful blisters.

By far the most impressive feature (the part that I “geeked out” about when I first experienced it) of Kinesio Tape is its adhesive properties. The adhesive is activated by heat. When it starts to peel off (for instance in water), all you have to do is pat-dry it and rub to produce heat from friction. Once it's dry, it sticks equally as good as when it was first applied, even on the sole of the foot. When it came time to remove the tape the first time I tried it, I braced myself for the familiar Band-Aid peeling pain, especially given the fact that it was able to retain stickiness after so much abuse. However, the Kinesio Tape came off painlessly and without leaving gunky residue like normal athletic tape. This tape is magical!



Left: Stash of tape and pre-wrap that I'm used to, “borrowed” from MIT's athletic training room. Right: Partially healed blisters from conventional athletic tape.