

An Interview with Champion Mountain Climber Jeff Gottfurcht: *The First Person in The World with Rheumatoid Arthritis to Successfully Summit Mount Everest*

Last year, *Nutra Pharma* sponsored Jeffrey Gottfurcht on his attempt to be the first person in the world with Rheumatoid Arthritis to climb Mount Everest. With rigorous training, mountain climbing expertise and [Nyloxin™](#) in his backpack, Jeff realized his dream. We [interviewed Jeff in February](#), before his journey began. Now, after just returning home, he spoke to us about the challenges and highlights of his monumental journey climbing Everest.



How does it feel to be the first person in the world with RA to summit Mount Everest?

In one word: lucky.

Don't you think perhaps a little bit of hard work had something to do with your success as well?

(Laughing) It was so much hard work. In fact, there is not a word that exists to describe the difficulty. Thousands of feet of sheer slippery slabs of iced rock walls, relentless windstorms, challenges with altitude and temperatures colder than you can imagine are part of every Everest climb.

How much of your success do you attribute to the rigorous conditioning you did before your climb?

That was a big part of it. There's both a physical and a mental element that goes into climbing Everest.

Are you going to be listed in the Guinness Book of World Records for being the first person with RA to successfully summit Mount Everest?

Yes! My father has been working with the publisher for the past two weeks on that.

How many people were on your climbing team?

There were 5 climbers and 5 Sherpas on our team.

Were there a lot of climbers and Sherpas on the mountain?

At base camps there are a lot of climbers. You don't see as many while you're climbing, but they are there on the mountain.

Did you see helicopters flying overhead while you were there?

Yes, there are helicopters all the time. You just aren't sure if they are bringing in supplies or rescuing climbers.

Are there people who give up along the way?

Yes, many do at all phases of the climb.

So do you think some people attempt to climb Everest without being fully prepared?

Yes, there are those people who attempt the climb because they think it would be a cool thing to do – not because they are physically conditioned and welcome the brutal challenge of the climb. You can't buy your way to the summit of Mount Everest. No one else can do the work for you; you've got to do it yourself. Nor can you use all your energy to get to the top and expect an elevator to take you down. You have to have the will and the endurance, and you simply can't allow yourself to give up.

I've read that every year there are fatalities on that mountain.

Yes, sadly that is true; there were several fatalities this season as well. Seeing the body of a mountain climber is an emotionally taxing event. The challenges climbers face are not just physical; they are mental as well. As we all know, the reality is that mountain climbing is not without risk, especially Everest. Climbers share a special bond and are supportive of each other. No one wants to see a fellow climber perish, and losing team members is very tough. But we must accept when it happens and have the strength to continue on our quest to reach the top and return to safety.



Are there doctors on Everest?

Yes, at the very base of the mountain there is the Himalayan Rescue Association (HRA) with a team of doctors. It's just difficult to get to climbers quickly at high levels and bring them down.

Why did you climb from Base Camp 4 to the summit at night?

That's how it is done. You have to climb up in the dark to arrive at the summit as soon as the sun comes up. That way you have time to get back down to safety before dark. You cannot linger on the summit due to the lack of oxygen and subzero temperatures, and it is important to be able to see while descending.

What was that like climbing in the dark?

Scary. You have headlamps, but you have to take your time. Taking the wrong step could be fatal. The wind was brutal and it was beyond freezing. Despite using oxygen, you can still feel the lack of it in the air. It is a strange feeling.

Outside of your team, were any other climbers at the summit with you?

None of the other teams wanted to summit that night because of the high winds. They were the smart ones! Tragically, the body of a climber from Japan, who had reached the top the day before, was up on a section called The Balcony near the summit. He experienced cerebral edema from the altitude and temperatures. The edema starts to make you confused and combative, and he would not listen to the Sherpas. He had hypothermia so badly that he thought he was overheating. He took off most of his gear including coat, goggles and gloves and died right there on the summit. This is one of the great risks for mountain climbers. You reach the top and are so exhausted, you think you can take a short nap but never wake up again. You've got to keep moving so you don't freeze to death.

Getting back to the subject of the summit, what is the view like from the top of the world?

You are looking down on the most magical sight. The panoramic views of the mountain ridges and sky are so vast, that it's completely overwhelming. It's as if there is nothing else on earth. We watched the sun rise and the sky was crystal clear. You can even see Base Camp 2, 10,000 feet below. And if you look over a ledge on one side, you can see Tibet.



Can you describe what was going through your mind when you reached the summit?

We were so fortunate that it was a clear day and not snowing. My legs and heart felt strong. Thoughts of the hard work it took to get me there and the support of my friends and family were all up there with me on that summit during that unforgettable moment. Despite the temperature and winds, it was pure glory. My Sherpa, Danaru and I cried and hugged. You can only stay up there a few minutes because the winds were around 70 miles per hour and it was between 30-40 degrees Fahrenheit below zero. Just after reaching the summit, my corneas started to freeze, and I began to lose my eyesight. Some of our team members also experienced frostbite on that summit.

So how did you get down without being able to see?

There is no time to lose at the summit of Everest, because the conditions are too severe to linger and also you need to make it back to safety before dark. My Sherpa, Danaru, was my eyes; thankfully his vision was not affected by the cold. The wrong step at that elevation can easily lead to a fall to your death. This was the greatest challenge of my life – getting back to Base Camp with almost no eyesight. I could see about 20% out of one eye, but I had absolutely no depth perception. I could not tell if a ledge was 2 feet down or 20. It took us a total of 25 hours from the time we left Base Camp 4 to reach the summit and then get back down to safety. On the way up, we left Base Camp 4 at 8:30 p.m. and reached the summit just after 6 a.m. It took us 15 hours to get down to safety. We had to climb all the way back down to Base Camp 2 because the windstorm was too severe at higher levels. As I said, there is no word in existence to describe the difficulty of this experience.

How did you get through those 25 hours both physically and mentally?

I couldn't see during the 15 hours it took to descend to Base Camp 2. The wind was so strong that we couldn't hear each other talk, and we had little water to drink because our water supply froze in our backpacks at that altitude. All I could think about was getting home to my family. I was not going to fail them. I wanted desperately to be back home in time for my daughter's birthday party. I kept telling myself that my legs and heart were strong, and I had to make this worth the risks. Dying would have been a waste of a lifetime preparing for this dream.

What was it like when you finally reached Base Camp 2 and could rest for the night?

I felt pure gratitude for our safety and for having made it all the way to the summit. I started to warm up and thankfully my vision returned quickly. I was euphoric. When I could finally see the green grass and flowers on the lower levels of the mountain, I felt pure joy.

It sounds like your personal Sherpa Danaru was your lifeline. Does he speak English?

Yes, he speaks English quite well. There are other Sherpas who don't. Danaru and I made a perfect team; we were meant to do this together. At 6'2" he is an unusually tall Sherpa. His size and strength played a crucial role in helping me get down from the summit after I lost my eyesight. He and I will be lifelong friends.



It's amazing how long it takes to reach the summit of Everest as compared to how quickly you climb back down.

The process of climbing up Everest requires a lot of down time. First you start with a two-week hike from Kathmandu to Base Camp. Once you start up the mountain, you climb for a day and then rest for a few days. Plus there are quite a few rotations, where you climb up and down during the ascent to acclimate to the altitude changes. If a climber were to go straight up without doing these rotations, he would perish. The body simply cannot adjust to the oxygen changes in the air that quickly. So the climb up takes about 6 weeks or so. But we climbed down in only 3 days!

You mentioned that the Sherpas and other climbers were calling you "Nyloxin" on your journey.

(Laughing) Yes, I was constantly wearing my [Nyloxin](#) jacket and using the product, so I earned that nickname. Everyone was asking what it was, so I had plenty of opportunities to talk about how much it helps me. Some of the American climbers mentioned they would check it out when they got back home. I know they won't forget the name of the product!

Did you use Nyloxin™ throughout the journey and how did that work for your Rheumatoid Arthritis?

I had a major flare-up early in the trip near the base of the mountain. My knees and wrists are usually where I get the most pain. It would not be good to have a flare-up at higher levels where I need to use ropes. I increased my use of [Nyloxin](#) and took Advil along with that for a few days. Then I stopped taking Advil and used only [Nyloxin](#) for the rest of the trip. Other than that one flare-up, my RA was well under control, thanks to [Nyloxin](#). I'm so grateful for it and will continue to use it!

Did Nyloxin freeze in those sub zero temperatures?

No. I carried my medicines in a pouch I wore around my neck, so they stayed safe and warm. It was a hassle to carry them that way, but it was the safest way. I had other medicines with me like antibiotics, inhalers and prednisone, but I never had to use any of those.

Did you sustain any injuries during the climb?

I was fortunate that I had no significant falls and no injuries, other than the temporary loss of my eyesight. I slipped a couple of times, but never got hurt. My body was totally ready for this challenge.

How much weight did you lose during the climb?

I lost 25 pounds, which is 5 clothing sizes! My pants are falling down. (Laughing) Climbing mountains is a treacherous activity, and weight loss is inevitable. Plus when you are freezing, you really tend to lose your appetite. But now that I'm home, I am enjoying all sorts of good food, including ice cream. I am going to have fun gaining that weight back!

Can you describe what it was like to climb the Lhotse Face?

We had to climb it 3 times, as there is a practice run and two passes during the expedition. The Lhotse Face is a sheer wall of 3000 feet of blue ice. It is a grueling experience, requiring ropes and relentless physical endurance. You take 3 steps and literally have to stop and take 7 breaths before moving on. The first time we climbed the wall on the practice run, it took 7 hours. The second time, it took about 5.5 hours. Naturally it's more laborious to climb up than down, but the steepness of the wall makes the decent rather complicated.



Before your trip, we talked about the rigorous physical preparations (hiking and running) you took the year before the climb to get ready. Is there anything you wish you had done differently?

I would not change a single thing. I was as physically and mentally prepared as anyone could be. All that training I did was all put to good use on that mountain.

At what elevation did you start to use oxygen, and how did that work for you?

Oxygen is necessary at Base Camp 4 (26,300 feet) and higher. It worked out well, and I would not have made it without it at those higher elevations. The tanks are loud so you can't really hear anything when you're wearing them, but serious - or fatal - trouble sets in at higher altitudes for most people who don't use them.

Is it possible to shower while you are on Everest?

Base camps do have showers, but I didn't take one. I decided that I was not going to take a

Did you see any wildlife on Everest?

Oddly enough the only wildlife I saw were 4 small birds at Base Camp 4, where oxygen levels are very low. I couldn't imagine how those birds were able to breathe. There are yaks and cows at Base Camp that are brought in to carry supplies, and someone actually carried a small dog up to Base Camp 2. (21,200 feet)

When you reached the summit, your wife, Emily, told us that your children were jumping around the house repeatedly chanting, "Daddy did it! He did it!" That must make the risks you took climbing that mountain all worth it.

I am a hero to my kids. They walk around with such pride that it makes my heart skip a beat. I even brought them some rocks from Everest. This experience will be a part of them forever.

I would imagine that being married to a mountain climber is difficult on your wife.

My wife gives me strength and is a significant part of my success. There's no way I could have done this without her. If she did not support me in every way, I would never have even attempted to climb Everest. It's stressful at times for her when I'm climbing, and she makes a lot of sacrifices. I have an overwhelming amount of gratitude for her.

Tell us what's new with your charity, the [Jeffrey Gottfucht Children's Arthritis Foundation](#).

Our charity is plugging along and we are still making dreams come true. In a few weeks it will be the first time we grant a child's wish to send his whole family to Disney World. We are super excited for this dream and ready to fulfill the wishes we receive.

What's the next adventure you have planned?

There is a mountain next to Everest called Ama Dablam. It is only about 22,000 feet and is known as the Matterhorn of the Himalaya. It has some completely vertical sections and is a very good climbing challenge. I look to do it in 2012. It is a classic climb in the Himalaya. I'll be bringing along bottles of [Nyloxin](#)TM for sure!

Only 22,000 feet? I wonder what your wife thinks about that.

Thank you for sharing the details of your extraordinary experience with us, Jeff. You have inspired people of all ages with your courage and determination, and there will be countless more who will be touched by your accomplishments. Everyone at Nutra Pharma wishes you great health and future success with your cause.

You can visit Jeff's organization, the [Jeffrey Gottfucht Children's Arthritis Foundation online](#).