

PREVENTING SKI INJURIES

Conditioning: You may think you are in great physical condition. You jog once in a while, bike, or swim several times a month; however this does not necessarily mean you're ready for skiing/snowboarding. Skiing or riding requires strength of the quadriceps, gluteal muscles, and the lower back area. Because of the demands of mountainous environment, above-average aerobic conditioning is necessary.

How to get there: Muscle training such as exercise bike, Stairmaster, running stairs in a stadium or high-rise are excellent options. In the Front Range, running the stairs at Red Rocks has become a popular option. However, nothing replaces training for skiing like skiing. At the gym, the sports cord which is an elastic band you work against is a convenient option. Doing squats and hamstring curls at the gym are also excellent. Plyometrics is another great way to build that explosive power needed in moguls and off-piste skiing.

Stretching is extremely important in the prevention of injury. Probably the most important thing to do prior to hitting the slopes is 10 minutes of aerobic activity. This gets the blood flowing and the muscles loosened up. Many injuries happen on the first run because people are not properly warmed up.

Equipment: Check your equipment. Check for loose screws or broken straps on snowboards. Ski bindings need to be checked every year, especially in older models. There are machines at the ski shops that check the reliability of release for bindings. Any qualified ski shop affiliated with the American Society for Testing of Material (ASTM) is qualified to evaluate them. Also make sure that there are no broken edges or exposed inner base that could weaken the ski or board.

Skiing knee injuries: If you have any problems with your knee(s), have them checked! Just as you check your bindings for reliability, you should also check your knee(s). The most commonly injured ligament in the knee while skiing is the ACL or anterior cruciate ligament. An ACL injury often requires arthroscopic surgery for best treatment. The classic signs of a ligament injury are an audible "pop" at the time of the injury, followed by swelling and a feeling of looseness in the knee. Staying in top shape and learning how to fall are two good ways to prevent ACL injuries. Knee injuries are much less common in snowboarding due to the nature of the equipment and motion involved.

Snowboarding injuries: The most common snowboarding injuries occur in the hands and wrists. It is important, especially while learning, to wear proper protective equipment and learn to fall into your body to absorb the force, not onto an outstretched, straight arm. Injuries to the lower extremities most often occur while jumping so ride within your ability and be wary of those monster "kickers."

Fatigue: Do not ski when you are tired. Most injuries occur later in the day when people do "one last run". It is better to quit early before an injury occurs.

Bail Out: Many knee injuries can be avoided if a person would bail out of an out-of-control turn rather than trying to salvage the turn to get back on top of the skis. When you fall, fall with your head and arms forward and with your skis together. You are much less likely to cause an injury to your knee by falling this way.

Human Behavior: Ski/ride in control. Collisions are a very common cause of injury; many injuries could be avoided by simple behavior modification.

Enjoy: Be safe and go out and enjoy your skiing/riding experience.

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