

How to Prevent Skiing Injuries

Skiing is one sport where common sense can truly prevent a high proportion of injuries and help avoid the most catastrophic problems. Research has shown that for downhill skiing, direct causes of accidents were mainly behavioral: excessive speed, skiing errors, and fatigue.

Safety Decisions

Unlike many other sports, a skier is constantly required to make safety decisions while engaging in the sport. Important decisions such as choosing the level of terrain, skiing with a partner or alone, and controlling one's speed should be considered carefully. These decisions should be talked about with younger skiers at the start of every day on the slopes and hopefully will lead to better decision making as these skiers mature.

Regretfully, there is no required test such as in driving or prerequisite training prior to a first-time outing; therefore, it is vitally important to remember safety factors. Awareness is a huge factor, and discussion and thought about avalanche risk; tree-skiing and avoidance of tree wells; and encouragement of rest when tired will decrease the chances of injury. It is also very important to remember that alcohol consumption should be avoided until after skiing.

Preparation

Little data exists on the role of stretching and strengthening as far as preventing ski injuries. Clearly, with increased fitness skiers are able to ski at a higher level. Many gyms have “pre-hab” programs to get ready for ski season, and certainly this should be encouraged.

Also, non-local skiers have higher injury rates, perhaps due to unfamiliarity with the terrain. It's wise to take any new runs slowly. Interestingly, an increase in snowfall decreases injury rates, perhaps due to the fact that increased snow slows the pace.

The Right Equipment

Fortunately, there are some ways in addition to behavior modification to decrease injury rates.

Media attention to high profile cases in the past few years has led to a much wider acceptance of helmet use. Head injury in skiing is much less likely with a well-fitted helmet. Young children, for the most part, have never skied without a helmet, and experienced skiers who grew up without wearing a helmet often find that they actually enjoy wearing one, as it keeps them warm and is comfortable.



Well-maintained equipment is a must, and a pre-season professional check, adjustment and lubrication of bindings is mandatory. In addition, skiing is a sport where you need your own equipment or need to rent properly fitted equipment, as borrowing equipment can result in improper setting of bindings and incorrect ski length.