



Ski and Snowboard Safely

Downhill skiing and snowboarding can be an exhilarating experience but, as with any sport, safety should come first. Excess speed and loss of control are the primary factors associated with snow skiing fatalities, according to a study reported in *The Physician and Sportsmedicine*, February 1989. The study also states that more than three-fourths of ski-related deaths occurred after collisions with stationary objects, such as trees and lift towers. Head injuries were cited most often as the cause of the fatalities. The National Safety Council strongly advises novice and experienced skiers and snowboarders to learn or reacquaint themselves with the proper skills and safety techniques.

Shaping-up for the season

Poor physical condition can be a contributing factor in skiing and snowboarding injuries. Being in good condition before attempting a strenuous sport will increase your enjoyment, reduce fatigue and help avoid injury.

Getting in shape does not mean a "crash course" of exercising one week before a trip. A regular routine of exercise to strengthen muscles that will be used more than usual is recommended. You should start exercising well before the season starts. For exercises best suited to help you get in shape, consult a fitness expert or personal trainer.

Hitting the slopes

A beginning skier or snowboarder should get proper instruction from a certified instructor before hitting the slopes. Among other basic skills, it is necessary to know how to fall down and get back up. At the start of the season, even an experienced skier or snowboarder should take a refresher course—just to be safe.

After you have mastered the basic skiing and/or snowboarding skills, the learning process is not over. Knowing snow conditions and the time of day you are planning to ski are just as important. Check with the local Ski Patrol for conditions and study a map of the area you will be skiing or snowboarding. Keep in mind that late in the day sunlight may obscure details of the terrain and make obstacles hard to see. One of the most important safety rules is to never ski or snowboard alone!

Rules of the slopes

The following is a list of rules that all skiers and snowboarders should know and obey:

- When skiing or snowboarding downhill, give moving skiers and snowboarders below the right of way. You should be able to see them: they might not see you.
- Stop on the side of a run, well out of the way and in view of other skiers and snowboarders.
- Look both ways and uphill before crossing a trail, merging or starting down the hill.

- Use a safety device to prevent runaway equipment.
- Never ski or snowboard alone.
- Follow all posted signs and rules. Avoid closed trails and out-of-bound areas.

Selecting and caring for equipment

Always select and use quality equipment. Improperly fitted or mis-adjusted equipment can cause the best skier and snowboarder injury. When buying equipment ask for expert advice. A trained sales associate at a reputable ski and/or snowboard shop will be able to best assist you when purchasing equipment. If you own ski and/or snowboard equipment, have them checked for proper fit and adjustment periodically throughout the season.

Boots and bindings are the most important part of a ski or snowboard outfit. Boots should be snug and comfortable. Proper bindings are critical and should be check by a professional regularly to make sure they are working properly. When purchasing skis or a snowboard, be sure to select the length and style right for your height and skill level.

Proper clothing is also an important part of your equipment. Choose comfortable, warm attire. Dress in layers. Bright colors are the best because they can be seen at a great distance. Outer wear should be made of a fabric which will reduce sliding after a fall and be water repellent.