

Safety

How to Stay Safe While Enjoying the Winter Weather

By Methodist Sports Medicine

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(HealthNewsDigest.com) - This winter many people will choose to forgo “hibernation” and participate in one of many exhilarating winter sports like skiing, hockey or snowboarding. From day trips to week long excursions, if you’re one of the millions of people who will participate in winter sports this year, there are many things you can do to avoid a side trip to the emergency room. “Many winter sports injuries like sprains, dislocations and fractures, can easily be avoided if athletes prepare for their sport by keeping in good physical condition, staying alert and stopping when they are tired or in pain,” says Mark Ritter, M.D., of Methodist Sports Medicine / The Orthopedic Specialists, a Clarian Health Partner. “Strength, stamina, flexibility and the use of proper equipment are all key in avoiding possible injuries.”

Dr. Ritter offers the following tips:

Hit the gym before hitting the ice and snow: Winter sports can help keep you in shape, but you shouldn’t rely on these activities as your daily form of exercise. Winter sports like skiing, snowboarding and hockey can be strenuous on the body. Conditioning your muscles prior to hitting the slopes or ice can help you maintain stamina and strength. To avoid unpleasant muscle aches, keep your body fit during the off season by doing single leg squats, weighted quadriceps squats and other full-body workouts.

Use proper equipment: Never borrow someone else’s equipment. If you don’t own equipment, you should rent from a ski shop, ice rink or resort, where they will adjust it to guarantee a proper fit. For skiers, boots and bindings must be adjusted correctly to ensure you don’t sustain leg injuries. For most winter sports, wrist guards and knee pads should be used to provide stability, reducing the chance of broken bones during a fall. One of the most important pieces of equipment is a helmet, as it can reduce the risk of head injury by 50 percent. If you are participating in ice hockey, make sure you also have a full face mask and mouth guard, in addition to your helmet.

Learn from an expert: To help avoid injuries from winter sports always take a lesson from a trained or certified professional. Many ice rinks and resort locations have onsite instructors and classes you can take before hitting the snow or ice. Instructors can teach you appropriate form so you aren’t twisting and turning your body in unnatural positions. They can show you how to maintain proper balance and avoid common injuries, such as ligament tears in the knee joint, fractures of the wrist, broken arms or shoulder injuries.

Know how to fall: The force of a fall while skiing or snowboarding can seriously injure your arm or knee joint. An estimated 30 percent of all types of skiing injuries are due to an improper stance. Snowboarders are especially vulnerable to wrist and shoulder injuries. Having both feet strapped in one set position can cause snowboarders to use an outstretched arm to brace for a fall. By using your arm, you can cause a wrist fracture. It's important that snowboarders learn how to roll into a fall to avoid these types of injuries.

Be cautious of body checking: In ice hockey, a body check that leads to full-body contact is one of the leading causes of injury on the ice. According to the British Columbia Injury Research and Prevention Unit, a reported 42 percent of trauma injuries are from body checking. This aspect of hockey can be very dangerous, which is why it's important to wear proper protective gear. Equipment should be approved by safety officials and worn properly to ensure that body checking does not do traumatic damage to you or your opponent's face or body.

Traveling to resort locations and participating in winter sports can be fun for people of all ages when safety is top priority.

For more information on how to stay safe during winter sports and activities, visit www.mykneehurts.info or www.methodistsports.com. Methodist Sports Medicine / The Orthopedic Specialists is a partner of Clarian Human Motion.

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