



Dr. Botti's Skiing Safety Tips

It is almost that time again--skiing and snowboarding season. Hopefully this season sees more snow than last. More snow translates to more days on the slopes, but unfortunately also means that there will be more injuries bringing us in to see our doctors.

Statistically speaking, injuries on the slopes are fairly rare. On average, for every 1000 people on the slopes on a given day, between 2 and 6 people will sustain an injury that requires medical attention. But statistics do not matter if you are the one getting injured.

While there is no way prevent all injuries (other than staying on your couch), there are some simple things that you can do to minimize your chance of injury. Preseason strength, flexibility, and cardiovascular training are important first steps for all alpine athletes.



Skiers are most likely to injure their knees, thumbs, and shoulders. Skiers should have their equipment checked and serviced each year and avoid borrowing gear unless it is adjusted by a professional. Using borrowed skis and bindings increases the likelihood of injury by a whopping 800 percent! Spending thirty minutes and a few bucks to get your equipment professionally adjusted is well worth it if it prevents a broken leg and several months on crutches.

Skier's thumb, which is the rupture to one of the stabilizing ligaments of the thumb, commonly occurs when the thumb gets caught on the ski pole strap when falling. The best way to prevent skier's thumb is to use strapless poles or to place the strap of the ski pole in your palm when grasping the pole.

Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL) rupture is a common knee injury that occurs in skiers and, contrary to popular belief, in snowboarders too. Recent research has shown that learning how to correctly fall can decrease your risk of ACL rupture. When skiing, always aim to keep your arms forward, feet together and hands over your skis. If you begin to fall, do not fully straighten your legs or attempt to sit down—always keep your arms and weight forward and your knees slightly bent. Lastly, do not attempt to get up while you are still sliding—wait until you are fully stopped.

Snowboarders are about 2 times more likely to be injured than skiers. Snowboarders most commonly injure their wrists, shoulders, and heads. Prevention is the key with snowboarding. All beginners should take professional lessons and wear wrist guards and a helmet. Helmets, although considered un-cool by some, have consistently been shown to decrease the risk of head injury.

Hopefully, these tips will help us all have a long, safe ski and snowboarding season. For more detailed information on alpine safety and conditioning, links to very informative web sites can be found at www.flagstaffboneandjoint.com.

Dr. Botti is an orthopaedic surgeon with fellowship training in sports medicine. He has been the team physician for the NFL's San Diego Chargers, the Summer X-Games, the United States Collegiate Rugby Team, as well as several colleges and high schools. He specializes in minimally invasive surgery, accelerated rehabilitation and early return to sports and activities.

