

Windsurfing - preventing injury

Windsurfing involves surfing on water with the aid of a sail. The equipment includes a board with a sail attached to a free-moving mast. Foot straps help the person to remain secure on the board. The person holds a horizontal boom and moves the sail to catch the wind.

The physical skills required are balance and stamina, rather than brute force. For a well-trained and safety conscious participant, the risk of injury (compared to other sports) is relatively low. However, when injuries occur they can be severe. The most common windsurfing injuries involve the legs and feet, and include fractures, sprains, cuts and bruises.

Common injuries

Common injuries include:

- **Skin damage** – including cuts, bruises and sunburn. Marine wildlife, such as jellyfish, can bite or sting.
- **Direct impact injuries** – such as blows to the head or body caused by collision with the equipment or the seabed.
- **Back injuries** – such as muscle pain, muscle strain or disc injury. The lower back is most vulnerable.
- **Sprains** – the ligaments of the ankle and foot are particularly vulnerable.
- **Fractures** – particularly of the ankle and foot. These injuries tend to occur when the person falls off the board while their feet remain hooked under the straps.
- **Dislocated shoulder** – the shoulder is prone to dislocation when the person falls from the board but fails to let go of the boom.
- **Other risks** – such as hypothermia and near drowning.

Risk factors

Some of the factors that can increase your risk of injury include:

- **Lack of fitness** – an unfit person with poor stamina and flexibility is much more likely to get hurt playing any type of sport.
- **Inexperience** – beginners may be at risk of injury because they do not have the skills or technique to meet the demands of the sport.
- **Poor technique** – puts unnecessary strain on joints and muscles: for example, trying to steer the sail with muscular strength rather than correct technique.
- **Lack of protective equipment** – neglecting to wear protective equipment, such as a helmet, can lead to severe injuries.
- **Certain manoeuvres** – such as jumping, high-speed falls and catapult falls.

General health suggestions

Suggestions include:

- If you have a medical condition, are overweight, are over 40 years of age or haven't exercised regularly for a long time, see your doctor for a check-up.
- Maintain a good level of fitness, flexibility and strength.
- Take windsurfing lessons to learn the skills and technique required.
- Respect your physical limitations. Don't continue windsurfing when you're fatigued.
- Drink plenty of fluids before, during and after windsurfing.
- Warm up thoroughly beforehand. Include jogging on the spot and plenty of stretching.

- Allow sufficient time to cool down afterwards. Stretching is an important part of your cool down routine.

General safety suggestions

Suggestions include:

- Consult with a specialist windsurfing retailer when purchasing equipment. They can help you choose an appropriate rig based on your size and skill.
- Choose a venue that is appropriate to your skill level and general fitness. Lakes are usually good learning grounds for beginners.
- Check the weather report. Never go windsurfing in extreme weather conditions, such as a storm, or if a storm is predicted.
- Before you windsurf, familiarise yourself with the hazards of the environment such as water currents, obstacles and local marine life. Ask other windsurfers if you are trying out a new location.
- Familiarise yourself with the low and high tides.
- It is safer to windsurf with a friend, so you can look out for each other on the water.
- Strictly follow all rules of sailing. If a particular beach has additional rules for windsurfers, obey them.
- Wear appropriate protective equipment such as a helmet, wet or dry suit, gloves, special sunglasses and rubber-soled slippers.
- Apply water-resistant SPF 30+ sunscreen to all areas of exposed skin. Reapply regularly.
- Don't jam your feet under the straps as far as they can go. Just tuck your toes so that your feet can come out of the straps if you fall.

What to do if you injure yourself

Suggestions include:

- Return to shore immediately if you are injured. Don't aggravate the injury by continuing to windsurf.
- Seek prompt medical treatment for all injuries irrespective of how severe the injury is.
- Treat all soft tissue injuries (ligament sprains, muscle strains, bumps and bruises) with rest, ice, compression, elevation (raise the limb above your heart) and seek advice from a health professional.
- Do not resume activity until you have fully recovered from injury.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Always call an ambulance in an emergency Tel. 000
- Victorian Poisons Information Centre Tel. 13 11 26 – seven days a week, 24 hours a day – for advice about poisonings, suspected poisonings, bites and stings, mistakes with medicines and poisoning prevention advice.
- Physiotherapist
- Windsurfing Victoria Tel. (03) 9597 0066
- Smartplay Tel. (03) 9674 8777

Things to remember

- For a well-trained and safety conscious windsurfer, the risk of injury in comparison to other sports is relatively low.
- Familiarise yourself with the hazards of the environment before you windsurf, such as water currents, obstacles and local marine life.
- Wear appropriate protective equipment such as a helmet, wet or dry suit, gloves, special sunglasses and rubber-soled slippers.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Smartplay

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