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## Snow sports - safety issues

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### Summary

- You can reduce your risk of injury from participation in snow sports activities through good preparation.
  - This includes pre-skiing strength and conditioning sessions, wearing appropriate clothing and protective gear, ensuring equipment is in good repair, avoiding alcohol before exercise, and checking for and avoiding extreme weather conditions.
  - Don't challenge yourself too much too soon – for example, don't attempt a ski run that is beyond your current skill and fitness level.
  - Children participating in winter sports need to be under direct adult supervision. Do not ask an older child to 'keep an eye' on a younger child.
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Winter sports such as skiing and snowboarding carry risks of injury and other safety concerns. Beginners are at increased risk. The most common causes of injury in winter sports are falls and collisions. You can substantially reduce the risks with common sense and proper planning, preparation and equipment.

### Preparation for winter sports safety

Be aware of the demands of your chosen winter sport and your own physical limitations. Basic safety suggestions include:

- Buy appropriate clothing and make sure your equipment is in good repair. Have your skis serviced annually and arrange for a professional to adjust your ski bindings.
- Use basic protective gear, such as a helmet – it can dramatically reduce your risk of serious injury.
- Use correct techniques. Arrange for lessons if necessary.
- Don't drink alcohol before participating in sport. While an alcoholic drink seems to warm you up, it actually narrows your blood vessels, particularly those of the hands. This can increase your risk of hypothermia and frostbite.
- Find out about weather conditions before you set out. Avoid extreme weather conditions such as snowstorms.
- Always let someone know where you are going and when you expect to return.
- If you are planning to go off-piste (to ski in areas other than the prepared ski runs), it is recommended that you carry an emergency position indicating radio beacon (EPIRB).

### Safety on the ski slopes

General winter sports safety suggestions include:

- Never participate in winter sports alone. With a partner (or two), you can use the 'buddy system' to look out for each other – for example, to check each other for signs of hypothermia.
- Drink plenty of water before, during and after sport.
- Carry some snacks or energy bars as fatigue increases the risk of injury.
- Don't challenge yourself too much too soon. For example, attempting a ski run that is beyond your skill and fitness level will dramatically increase your risk of harm.
- Be alert for natural and man-made hazards, such as trees or snow equipment.
- Don't push yourself to exhaustion. Rest at regular intervals to avoid fatigue-related injuries.
- If you fall, don't try to get up while you are still sliding – wait until you stop.
- If you are lost, retrace your steps. If you can't retrace your steps, seek shelter and wait for help.

### The Alpine Responsibility Code

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In downhill snow sports, you must obey the **Alpine Responsibility Code** and any rules of the mountain:

- Know your ability. Always stay in control, and be able to stop and avoid other people or objects. It is your responsibility to stay in control on the ground and in the air.
- Take lessons from qualified professional instructors to learn and progress.
- Use appropriate protective equipment to minimise the risk of injury.
- Before using any ski lift, make sure you know how to and are able to load, ride and unload safely. Always use the restraining devices.
- Observe and obey all signs and warnings. Keep off closed trails or runs.
- Give way to people below and beside you on the hill. It is your responsibility to avoid them.
- Do not stop where you are not clearly visible from above. Look uphill and give way to others when entering or exiting a trail or starting downhill.
- Always ensure your equipment is in good condition and use suitable restraining devices to avoid runaway skiing or boarding equipment.
- Do not ski, board, ride a lift or undertake any other alpine activity if your ability is impaired by drugs or alcohol.
- If you are involved in or witness an accident or collision, alert Ski Patrol. Remain at the scene and identify yourself to the Ski Patrol when they arrive.

### **Reduce your risk of cold injury**

Cold-related injuries include frostbite, hypothermia, muscle sprains and strains, 'snow blindness' and sunburn. However, many of the risks can be reduced with planning, adequate preparation and proper equipment.

### **Signs of cold injury**

If your feet get wet, seek shelter as soon as you can. The skin tissues of wet, cold feet are in danger of freezing (frostbite).

Seek shelter and medical attention immediately if you or anyone with you has any of the following symptoms:

- grey or blue facial skin
- cold, hard and white skin
- numb patches on the skin
- swollen and blistering skin
- uncontrollable shivering, followed by lack of shivering
- loss of physical coordination
- speaking difficulties, such as slurring
- loss of control over the small muscles – for example, the muscles of the fingers
- a strong yearning for sleep.

### **Caring for children during winter sports**

Suggestions include:

- Children participating in winter sports should be under the direct supervision of an adult. Do not ask an older child to 'keep an eye' on a younger child.
- Because of their small size, children are at increased risk of cold injuries. Layered clothing, gloves and a hat are very important. Check children frequently for signs of hypothermia and frostbite.
- Attach a name tag with contact information to their clothing in case you are separated from them.
- Avoid piggybacking a child while participating in a snow sport. The risks include hypothermia and injuries from falling.

### **Where to get help**

- In an emergency, always call triple zero (000)

- Local ski patrol
- **Snowsafe**
- Your GP (doctor)
- **Physiotherapist**

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