

## GENERAL INFORMATION FOR EVERYONE ON THE SLOPES

### Preventing injuries snow sports injuries

For those of us who love snow sports, one of the worst things is being unable to ski or board. Whilst we can't do much about some of the reasons for this (such as a lack of snow), we can do lots to prevent ourselves being injured. That is the prime aim of this website - to prevent injuries occurring in the first place whilst also emphasising that snow sports are in fact relatively safe. So, first and foremost don't get paranoid - contrary to what you might think or have heard, the risks of an injury whilst skiing or snowboarding are much much lower than most people believe. For every one thousand people on the slopes per day, statistically between 2-4 only will sustain an injury that requires medical attention - in percentage terms that's a risk of only 0.2-0.4%. So, although the overall risk is less than 1%, if it happens to be you it may not only bring your eagerly awaited holiday to an abrupt end, but could also prove to be very expensive in terms of medical treatment and time off work. Snow-sports deaths, whilst often making front page news, are in fact very rare - there only being one death on the slopes every 1.5 million skier days. In fact stats from America demonstrate that overall ten times more people drown in a bath-tub than die on the slopes every year.

Other individuals sustain avoidable minor soft tissue injuries which can nevertheless interfere with the enjoyment of their holiday. Here are a few simple tips that can help to significantly reduce your risk of injury without spoiling the enjoyment of your time on the

### General Advice For Everyone on the Slopes

- ▶ Follow the F.I.S. code on piste safety (see later). In today's litigious world the chances are that you may face a civil charge of negligence if you ignore the code and cause an accident/injury to someone/thing else and have to pay damages (and substantial legal fees). In addition, criminal charges may also be applied – in a highly publicised case after a fatal skier-skier collision, Nathan Hall was convicted of criminally negligent homicide in Colorado and was sentenced to ninety days in jail, 240 hours of community service, and three years' probation – not to mention any ensuing claim for financial compensation – sobering stuff.....other similar cases have since been reported and doubtless more will follow.
- ▶ Don't be tempted to skip professional instruction – injuries are commoner in beginners and bad habits learnt early on are difficult to resolve later. This may lead to you hitting a brick wall at the 'intermediate stage' when you want to progress that wee bit further. Be aware though, that early on if you take instruction not to ruin everything by trying to do too much too soon. Our research indicates that those on their very first day who take instruction are in fact more likely to be injured than those who do not!
- ▶ Have your own equipment checked regularly or use a reputable equipment hire company as advised by your rep. Don't be tempted to overstate your level of skill – longer skis are more difficult to turn and bindings set too high for your ability are more likely to cause injury. Boots should fit snugly without your ankle moving around inside. If your skis, board, boots or bindings don't feel right, don't be afraid to go back to the hire shop. Staff at hire facilities should take time to fit your equipment properly – if they don't ask you any questions about your height/weight/ability then seriously consider going somewhere else to hire your gear – even if it is a bit more expensive and a bit of a hassle. Believe me, sorting out a broken leg whilst abroad is a lot more hassle.
- ▶ Whatever you do, don't borrow equipment off your friends. This increases your risk of injury by a massive 800%!
- ▶ Warm up and down properly – spend a few minutes gently stretching your hamstrings, thigh muscles, hips and calves before and after going on the slopes. Hold each stretch gently for 30 seconds. It shouldn't hurt!
- ▶ Recognize when you need a rest – most injuries occur after lunchtime when tiredness sets in.
- ▶ Hard though it is, try and avoid being persuaded to attempt slopes or speeds beyond the level of your ability. Our injury data suggests that you are more likely to be injured if you try and keep up with more experienced friends
- ▶ Wear adequate clothing, preferably in layers. Don't forget good quality sunglasses, goggles and sunscreen.
- ▶ Consider wearing a protective helmet. Whilst some consider them “untrendy” there is nothing cool about sustaining a head injury. Ideally, any helmet should comply with one of the American standards (Snell RS98 or ASTM F2040) or the European standard EN1077. This indicates that it has passed certain standards. No helmet will protect the foolhardy who ski too fast and/or out of control and then slam into a tree or other static object.

- ▶ Never ski or board off-piste alone. Be aware of the prevailing avalanche risk and, if in doubt, consult a local guide or the ski patrol before setting out. Carry all the appropriate gear including an avalanche transceiver and know how to use it.
- ▶ Be aware of the risk posed by tree wells. It's a horrible way to die and largely preventable. Refer to the article on this website for more information on tree wells – <http://www.treewelldeepsnowsafety.com/>
- ▶ Never attempt to ski or board down a closed piste. Not only do you run the risk of serious injury, but you could be prosecuted and be held liable for the costs of any rescue. Ski patrollers are not killjoys – pistes are only closed for good reason, even if those reasons are not immediately apparent to you.

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