

Ski Season is Coming: Be Aware...or Beware

by Jeffrey Malumed, M.D., Premier Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine

As the temperatures turn colder, skiing enthusiasts of all skill levels will wait with anticipation for that time when snow—real or “manufactured”—will fall on the slopes of resorts all across the nation. But whether you ski the “bunny slopes” or expertly maneuver around moguls, being properly prepared can help prevent injury and ensure a season of excitement.

Skiing is a very strenuous, physical sport—especially if you are tackling mountains out West (which can get as high as 10,000 feet). At altitudes that high it is especially important to make sure you train through aerobic conditioning and muscle strengthening.

While it’s good to exercise all year long, if you are going to go skiing I like to recommend a six-week program that includes strengthening of the lower extremities and back, as well as aerobics. Do your routine three times a week for about 30 minutes a day. In addition, stay well hydrated while out on the slopes, don’t smoke and limit your alcohol intake.

I treat a lot of sport-related injuries. For 10 years I was one of the team physicians for the U.S. Men’s Olympic Ski Team, so you can imagine I saw a vast assortment of injuries. The most common, which you would never think, is something called “skier’s thumb.” This is an injury to the ligament in the thumb that happens when you fall down, your ski pole gets jammed between the thumb and index finger, and the ligament in the thumb tears. I actually did that to both of my thumbs once while helicopter skiing in Alaska.

Besides sprains and strains, most other common injuries involve tearing of the anterior cruciate ligament (known as the “ACL”) and media collateral ligament in the knees. Treatment of torn ligaments in the knee usually involves surgery, but it depends on the athlete’s age and severity of the injury. Sometimes we can manage ligament tears without surgery.

So what’s the best way to avoid a ski injury? Prevention. And how do you practice prevention? By being in shape, skiing within your ability, and not smoking or drinking (which can impair your ability to ski). If you do sustain an injury, see your doctor or an orthopaedic specialist as soon as you can. Our goal is to get you back on the slopes as soon as you can.

Happy trails!

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