

Skiing & Snowboarding: Safety First

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Awe, 'tis the season....

Now that the holiday season is complete, many of you have plans to hit the slopes this winter. Whether your preference is the skis or the board, certain safety precautions should always be followed.

First, for you history buffs, here's a little background on both sports:

The act of skiing dates back to as far as 5000 years ago in Norway or Sweden. The word *ski* is Norwegian for "a stick of wood" and the usefulness of skis for military purposes was documented by the Norwegian army in the 1670s. In fact, the Finnish army stymied a fierce Russian attack in 1939 due in large part to its soldier's ability to engage the Russians on skis. This inspired President Roosevelt in 1943 to authorize the formation of the 10th Mountain Division.

Though debatable, the "father of modern skiing" is Norwegian Sondre Norheim of Telemark. In the mid-1800s, he reportedly invented the equipment and techniques that led to modern skiing as we see it today. He also invented the first bindings and the first short, curved, flexible ski to allow for easier turning in soft snow. Mountain resorts became commercially viable when electrically-driven aerial tramways became commonplace in the 1880s. In 1936, the world's first modern-day overhead chairlift was built in Sun Valley, ID.

Downhill and combined slalom ski events were introduced to the Third Winter Olympic Games in 1936. American Billy Kidd's silver medal in the slalom event at the 1964 Winter Olympics in Innsbruck began a boom in American interest and participation in the sport.

Snowboarding, without the long storied history of skiing, has become a very popular wintertime alternative, especially for the younger generations. Sherman Poppen in 1968 developed the first resemblance

of a snowboard. The early 1980s brought about the design of the modern-looking snowboard, that which resembles a skateboard, in the country of France.

It, too, continued to increase in popularity and became an Olympic sport. Selling snowboarding equipment became a \$487 million industry in 2008.

The Washington Military Department in 2002 has some great skiing and snowboarding safety precaution tips. They are listed here with a couple of other general tips. First, some tips before you go skiing or snowboarding:

- Get Ready: Develop and maintain a standard of general physical fitness including cardiovascular and musculoskeletal which consists of flexibility, strength, endurance and coordination.
 - Arguably the most important aspects of a pre-season program would be adding strength to your thigh muscles, front and back, and increasing your balancing ability. You can work on the thigh muscles with a multitude of exercises and one of the simplest balance training techniques is to stand on one leg with your eyes closed on an unsteady surface; such as a mini-trampoline, bosu or even a couple of pillows/cushions stacked together.
- Condition Yourself: Stretch all your muscle groups before each activity you participate in to stay well-toned and avoid injury. Hold stretches for 30 seconds and repeat two to three times. Cool down with gentle stretches after your activity to relax your muscles.
- Obtain the proper equipment and be sure to have your bindings and boots adjusted correctly.
- Make sure you have adequate water and wind-resistant skiwear. It is recommended you dress in layers to allow you to adjust according to the changing temperatures.
- Plan to wear sun protection, even on cloudy days. The reflection off the snow can be very strong.
- Because there can be difficulty seeing in certain conditions, always wear some form of eye protection.
- **Most importantly**, plan to wear a helmet. Don't try to be cool; be safe....and smart.

And, here are some tips while you are on the slopes:

- If you are a beginner or haven't been on the slopes for a while, then take a lesson. (Even advanced skiers take lessons.)
- Always stay in control. That includes knowing your abilities, keeping an eye on the ever-changing terrain, and being aware of the others around you.
- Drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration. Stay away from alcohol.
- Know your physical limits and stop before you become too fatigued.
- **Be responsible:**
 - +People ahead of you have the right of way.
 - +When starting out, look uphill and yield to others.
 - +Observe signs and warnings and keep off closed trails.

So, whether you're skiing or snowboarding, remember these important concepts. They will make your time on the slopes that much more enjoyable. Have fun!

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References

- The Washington Military Department, Emergency Management Division, 2002.
- Wikipedia, 2011.
- National Athletic Trainers Association