

It's snow season: Stay safe on the slopes

December 12 2022, by Cara Murez



Skiers and snowboarders, take note: You're less likely to get hurt if you ease back into the winter sports season.

"We see a lot of patients in the After-Hours Clinic (of the department of orthopedic surgery) on their way back from [skiing](#) and snowboarding," said [Dr. Sabrina Sawlani](#), a sports medicine physician at UCLA Health, in Los Angeles.

Sawlani, whose UCLA sports medicine fellowship included training at the urgent care ski clinic at Northstar Resort in Lake Tahoe, offered some tips for those who want to hit the slopes without getting hurt.

Before [downhill skiing](#), she recommended six weeks of cardiovascular conditioning through running, biking, stair-climbing or using an elliptical machine. Target muscles involved in skiing, such as your core, hamstrings, quadriceps and glutes.

"Those are the areas I'd really try to focus on—really stretching out those areas, and your low back and shoulders," she said in a UCLA Health news release. "There's no perfect routine, but really incorporating strength, endurance, stability and your overall fitness and flexibility to keep your body safe from injury is important."

Have your [equipment](#) checked by a professional if you haven't used it in a couple of years, she urged.

"Retest that release mechanism with a certified shop every year," said Sawlani, who is a skier and snowboarder. "You want to test that self-release each day while you're skiing and make sure your bindings are clean."

Helmets can help prevent serious head injuries. Concussions are, of course, common in both skiing and snowboarding.

Get a ski lesson if you're a beginner or it has been awhile since you took to the slopes, Sawlani said.

Choose runs based on your ability and conditioning, letting go of your ego.

"If you're out of shape, you want to select your ski runs more carefully," Sawlani said. "Then gradually work up to the more challenging runs."

Do some warmup runs. Make sure you've fueled up in advance with good nutrition and hydration, she advised.

Sawlani said you must learn how to stop and follow the rules of the mountain for merging and yielding. Generally, skiers and riders ahead of you have the right of way. Take extra care getting on and off the chair lift.

"Your equipment can get stuck on someone else's equipment and that could potentially cause a serious injury," Sawlani said.

If you're tired, stop.

"A lot of injuries will actually occur on the first or the last run of the day, or even right after lunch," Sawlani said. "If you're not warmed up, if you're fatigued, and you're just trying to get that one last run in, then you're more at risk for [injury](#)."

She also noted the difference in injuries she sees between the two snow sports and in different genders.

Women tend to be at greater risk of knee-ligament injuries because of anatomic and biomechanical differences. Tears to the [anterior cruciate ligament](#) (ACL) are far more likely in female recreational skiers than in men, Sawlani said.

Snowboard boots allow for more foot and ankle injuries than ski boots

do.

Falling with ski poles can cause "skier's thumb," a tear of the ulnar collateral ligament, which stabilizes the thumb and allows for gripping.

"In snowboarding, we see more upper-extremity injuries, just from falling on an outstretched hand," she said. "In skiing, we see a lot more of those lower-extremity injuries," such as knee sprains, ligament tears and broken shinbones.

More information: The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons has more on [skiing safety](#).

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