Lifestyle

Preventing Winter Sports Injuries

Snow, ice, and cold mean the start of the winter sports season and changing the way we play. As a physiotherapist in the mountain community of Canmore, I can tell it’s winter by the snow on the ground, and by the type of injuries my clients have.

Winter sports injuries can be reduced or prevented. All it takes is a few changes to your routine before heading out for your dose of frosty fitness.

Balance and Agility: Good balance helps you negotiate changing terrain or snowy, icy surfaces while helping to reduce and avoid injuries. Improve and fine-tune your balance and agility—crucial building blocks for performing on snowy, icy surfaces, or on thin shis, boards or blades—with exercises like one-legged squats, walking on a log or standing still with your eyes closed. Balance boards and agility ladders also get high marks.

Core Strength, Stability and Alignment: A strong core helps support and control your spine. Core strength and optimal alignment reduce your chance of falling, which in turn reduces the risk of strains and injuries. Improve core stability with planks, bridging exercises and push-ups, or use an exercise ball. Core conditioning classes and Pilates are also excellent options.

Flexibility: Occasional falls or slips are inevitable, especially on snow or ice. Supple, flexible muscles help to reduce fall-related injuries and injury severity. Stretch properly and regularly, before and after activity.

Strength and Power: Improve your technique and lessen fatigue-induced injuries by strengthening your major muscles (quadriceps, hamstrings, lower back and glutes). Aim for more squats, lunges, hill climbs and tuck jumps.

Warm-Up: Don’t dive right into sports without warming up muscles and joints. Even a short, dynamic warm-up at the start will increase circulation, wake up your neuromuscular system, and prepare you for physical exertion. Bottom line: reduced chance of injury.

Equipment: Make sure your equipment fits and works properly. Maintain your gear regularly. Wear a helmet when appropriate.

Landing: If you find yourself in the air (by choice or not), it’s important to land safely. Landing without good alignment can cause injury. Knee injuries are often the result of landing twisted, hyper-extended or leaning back. If you have to jump, do it by landing with a solid athletic stance (hips, knees and ankles flexed. Keep squarely aligned with your core).

A physiotherapist can help you with customized injury prevention advice and techniques.

By Lynne Richardson, PT

Sport-Specific Hazards

Winter Runners: Strained muscles from inadequate warm-up, or sprains due to slips and falls. A warm-up is essential. Try ice grips that slip over shoes for added traction.

Snowboarders: Spinal injuries and shoulder dislocations. Proper protective equipment and proper landing techniques are crucial.

Skiers: Injured knee ligaments. Optimize leg strength, balance and agility to reduce falls.