

Staying Safe on the Slopes

Winter sports are exhilarating, with crisp air, fresh snow, and the thrill of carving down the mountain. But they also come with real risks. Each year, tens of thousands of people are treated for [winter sports-related injuries](#), ranging from sprains and fractures to concussions to dislocations. The good news is that most of these are preventable with the right preparation, awareness, and equipment.

Know the Risks

Understanding common injury patterns can help you make safer choices on the mountain.

- [Between 100,000 and 200,000 people are treated for winter sports injuries each year.](#)
- [Skiing and snowboarding alone account for more than 120,000 injuries annually in the U.S.](#)
- The most common injuries include sprains, strains, fractures, dislocations, and concussions.
- Many injuries occur at the end of the day, when fatigue sets in and people push for “one last run.”

Gear Up the Right Way

Proper equipment is your first line of defense.

- Wear a [certified helmet](#) designed for skiing or snowboarding.
- Use goggles, gloves, and wrist guards (especially when snowboarding).
- Make sure your bindings are professionally adjusted to your weight, skill level, and boot type.
- Dress in layers to stay warm and dry. Wear a moisture-wicking base layer, an insulating mid-layer, and a waterproof outer shell.
- Inspect your gear before each outing for cracks, loose parts, or excessive wear.

Warm Up and Know Your Limits

Cold muscles are more prone to injury. Remember Rule #18 from Zombieland: Limber up!

- Do 5-10 minutes of light movement or stretching before hitting the slopes.
- Start with easier runs to get your body warmed up gradually.
- Take breaks during the day; fatigue is a major contributor to accidents.
- Stop immediately if you feel pain, dizziness, or confusion.
- Dehydration and low blood sugar increase injury risk in cold weather. [Drink water and eat regularly.](#)



Follow Mountain Safety Rules

Most ski areas follow the [Responsibility Code](#), and it's worth reviewing before every season.

- Stay in control and be able to stop or avoid others.
- Yield to people downhill; they have the right of way.
- Stop only in visible, safe areas.
- Look uphill before merging onto or crossing a trail.
- Use devices to prevent runaway equipment.
- Obey all signs, warnings, and hazard markings.
- Keep off closed trails and stay out of closed areas.
- Know how to load, ride, and unload lifts safely.
- Do not use the lifts or terrain when impaired by alcohol or drugs.

Stay Aware of Your Surroundings

Situational awareness matters on the slopes just as much as it does in everyday life.

- Watch for fast-moving skiers or snowboarders approaching from behind.
- Keep an eye on changing snow and weather conditions.
- Avoid distractions. Save the photos and videos for safe, stopped locations.
- Know where you are on the mountain. Carry a trail map or use the resort's app.

Have an Emergency Plan

A little preparation goes a long way if something goes wrong.

- Know the location of ski patrol stations and how to contact them.
- Carry a small first aid kit and a fully charged phone. Cold drains batteries quickly; keep phones in an inner pocket close to your body.
- Ski or ride with others when possible.
- If you are alone, tell someone your planned trails and expected return time.

End the Day Safely

The last run is often the riskiest.

- If you are tired, call it a day. Don't push for "just one more."
- Stretch after skiing or riding to reduce soreness and stiffness.
- Check your gear for damage before storing it so it's ready for next time.

With the right preparation, you can reduce risk and build confidence. Preparedness isn't about limiting the fun; it's about making sure you get to enjoy the mountain all season long.