

Have fun and stay fit this winter

For many of us, the first sign of frost means our favourite winter activities are just around the corner. It also means icy steps and sidewalks, snow to shovel and finding the best ways to stay warm.

Whether you're a snowboarder, skier, snowmobiler, jogger or skater, you need to know how to take care of your back in winter conditions. Otherwise, the sudden twists and bumps from winter sports can sideline you with painful muscle strains and tears. Some winter sports, like snowmobiling, skiing, tobogganing, and snowboarding, can be especially hard on your back. Check with your chiropractor before starting any new winter sport.

Always warm up.

Start by stretching your muscles at home. Focus on the lower back and leg muscles, such as hamstrings and calf muscles. When you arrive at your sporting destination, warm up again. Your chiropractor or fitness professional can advise you on the best stretches for your favourite sports, but here are some examples:

- **Skating:**

Do some lunges. Take a good-sized forward step with your right foot, and let your left knee sink toward the floor. Keep your shoulders aligned over your hips. Repeat 5 to 10 times, and then do it all over again with the left foot.

- **Skiing:**

Do 10 to 15 squats once you're at the ski hill. Place your legs shoulder-width apart, align your knees above your feet and lower your buttocks slowly. Straighten up slowly and repeat.

- **Tobogganing:**

Do some knee-to-chest stretches while sitting or lying on your back. Pull your knees to your chest and hold for 30 seconds. This helps your spine be as flexible as possible as you bounce through the snow.

Use the right safety equipment.

This means helmets, face guards, and protective clothing. Make sure that your equipment is in good condition, and fits properly. Shop at a reputable outdoor or sporting goods store, and have someone there adjust and fit your equipment to your size and shape.

On the slopes, make sure that ski and snowboard bindings are adjusted for your height and weight. Always check the weather conditions and watch the trails for icy patches and other potential hazards.

Dress for the weather.

Layered clothing works better to keep your muscles warm and your skin dry so you don't get chilled. You may want to invest in clothing designed specifically for winter outdoor activity (available at your local outdoor or sporting goods store), or layer garments made of natural fibres (like cotton, wool and silk).

Know when to rest.



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Rest when you feel tired. Stop your activity immediately if you experience sudden or prolonged pain in any joint or muscle. Cool down by stretching, and change into dry, warm clothes.

Stay hydrated.

Don't be fooled by the temperature! Your active body needs plenty of fluids even though it's cold outside. Be sure to drink lots of water or juice before, during and after winter sports.

Follow these tips, and you're well on your way to having a safe and healthy winter.

