

CELEBRATE safety

*January is National
Safety Awareness Month*

Nothing ruins a skiing or snowboarding weekend like having to hitchhike down the hill in a ski patroller's sled — or in an ambulance. Fortunately, the overall rate of skiing injuries has declined by 50% since the 1970s.

This decline is largely due to significant improvements in the equipment. Skis are shorter and hourglass shaped making them more responsive and easier to turn. And, more important, ski bindings release more easily than those of a generation ago, reducing the risk of fractures in the lower legs.

Skiers who are injured have a few things in common. They are generally male and have a "high readiness for risk" as they are eager to try jumps and moguls.

So what can you do to reduce the risk of injury?

First, start thinking about conditioning long before the ski season arrives. Skiing and snowboarding both demand a lot from the muscles in the quads and lower back, and from the knees.

It may be too late for preseason conditioning, but these tips will also help keep you and your family safe on the hill.

- Make sure your equipment fits. Borrowing equipment from well-meaning friends is never a good idea.
- Make sure your equipment functions. If you own your ski gear, have the bindings examined by a ski shop technician at the beginning of each season.
- Don't go out cold. Before you slide onto the chairlift, do some dynamic movement exercises to warm up your muscles.

- Stay forward. Your instinct, when you get going too fast, is to lean back. This only makes you go faster.
- When you start to fall, just go with it. The more rigid you are, the more likely you'll be hurt when you fall.
- Wear a helmet. Helmets do not decrease the risk of skiing or snowboarding related head injuries, but they do reduce the severity.
- Finally, take lessons. No one is ever too good for instruction. ♦