

Safety, Health & Fitness —

The Importance of Stretching

Every day we spend hours sitting, driving and standing, tasks that contract our muscles. On the slopes, tight muscles can cause the body to move incorrectly by forcing body weight and motion to shift to other groups of muscles.

Stretching before skiing signals the muscles that they are about to be used and helps elongate them, reducing tension and improving flexibility. Moguls will be less jarring to your knees when quadriceps are stretched and hamstrings relaxed, and turns will be easier with a more flexible back.

Flexible muscles help reduce injury. When a muscle is more flexible, there's more range of motion and more power in the joint. Regular stretching will make you a more coordinated skier, allowing freer and easier movement. Best of all, it will allow you to ski longer days.

You can keep your stretching routine simple, spending 15 to 20 minutes on the major muscle groups involved in skiing. Even five minutes daily can be effective. Establish a short stretching routine and be consistent with it.

Always stretch when muscles are warm. Before stretching, walk around for two to five minutes while swinging your arms. Mild exercise raises the core body temperature and increases blood flow in the body, reducing the chance of pulling a muscle during the stretch.

Stretching before and after skiing can make your muscles more efficient and keep them from tiring out as fast, as well as prevent injury.

TIPS Hold each stretch for 10 to 15 seconds, relaxing into the pose. Breathe rhythmically to soften any tension. Quiet your mind, and focus your attention on the spot where you feel the greatest stretching sensation. Stretching is not a competitive sport. Work at your own pace to ensure safety. Only hold stretches that are comfortable; never stretch to the point of pain, and always be in control of your movements. Never bounce while stretching—this can make you tighter or cause injury. Only a relaxed muscle will allow itself to be stretched.

Cardiovascular

Cardiovascular conditioning trains the ability of the three major systems (pulmonary, cardiovascular, and muscular) to take in, transport and utilize oxygen. Improving these systems increases your total work capacity. What you get out of it are more runs down the mountain without running out of steam!

Activity Choice: Any activity that uses the large muscle groups, you can maintain the required time and intensity, and is aerobic in nature (e.g., running, jogging, hiking, swimming, biking, stair climbing, roller blading, rowing, etc.). Many sport activities may qualify as cardiovascular conditioning as long as they maintain intensity for an extended period of time. Many skiers favor the jump-rope for its combined cardiovascular and plyometric effect.

Just In Time For Vacation Season: A Traveler's Checklist

10 Ways to Avoid Disappointment on Your Next Vacation
by USTOA

Here are some tips from the nonprofit United States Tour Operators Association on how to avoid disappointment on your next vacation

- If a telemarketer offers you a vacation deal, never give your credit card number over the phone.
- If an offer sounds too good to be true, it probably is.
- Seeing the offer on a Web site does not count as getting an offer in writing. A Web site can be easily changed and provides no proof of what the offer was like when you first saw it. (Source: National Fraud Information Center, part of the National Consumer League)
- Before purchasing a vacation, check with a travel agent or other reliable source to be sure that the company you are dealing with is legitimate.
- Find out if the company is a member of an organization with a consumer protection plan, such as USTOA [www.ustoa.com].
- Know the cancellation clauses in your travel agreements.
- To save money, investigate early booking discounts offered by tour operators.

- If you can't find space on your own at a popular destination, consider a vacation package. Tour operators and travel packagers reserve blocks of space at the most popular destinations well in advance. Best of all, they can often save you up to 40% over booking the same vacation on your own.
- Book airfare when you make your vacation arrangements. Don't play airplane roulette, waiting until the last minute to see what late airline sales occur. This is particularly true if you're traveling to a highly visited area, where flights may be booked well in advance.
- Be realistic: you get what you pay for. Don't expect luxury accommodations at bargain basement prices.

For a free copy of USTOA's "Smart Traveler's Planning Kit," and a listing of USTOA Active Member companies, contact USTOA, 342 Madison Avenue, Suite 1522, New York, NY 10173; phone 1-800-GO-USTOA (468-7862); or e-mail information@ustoa.com. Information on USTOA member companies as well as the destinations they serve is available on the Internet at www.ustoa.com.