

# Are you fit enough to get fit?

As our bodies recover from that post Christmas lethargy our minds turn to getting fit for the spring and summer. For many it is the Easter skiing holiday and for others it is to join the current running and cycling explosion. Some are participating for the first time whilst others are rekindling activities of youth. For both these groups, enthusiasm and perceived ability often exceeds physical capability and this is where there is a risk of injury and breakdown. So we need to stop and ask the question 'Are we fit enough to get fit? Andrew Holbrook explains . . .



For skiers, the knee joint currently accounts for around 30-40% of injury. Damage to ligaments are common due to twisting forces placed through the joint. Specifically the ACL (Anterior Cruciate Ligament) and MCL (Medial Collateral Ligament) are vulnerable and often injury is serious enough to require reconstructive surgery.

For beginners, a lot of stress is placed on the MCL. This ligament, located on the inside of the knee, is often sprained by repeated snow plough positions or where bindings do not release. Snowboarding demonstrates a completely different pattern of injuries largely due to the more difficult balance requirements and non-releasing bindings. The wrists, ankles, coccyx and head are the most common areas of injury, a consequence of hard or awkward falls.

Several factors are worthy of consideration in the avoidance of injury:

Are we flexible enough to withstand the positions the activity will involve? If there is one sport that requires good flexibility it is skiing. Flexibility refers to the ability of your muscles and connective tissues to extend, reducing the compressive pressure on joints and allowing more effective absorption of shock. Good flexibility will also aid fluidity of movement and expression of individual technique. This is essential where the activity offers the prospect of two legs going in different directions.

Cardiovascular fitness is the next factor to consider. A skiing holiday will usually comprise several consecutive days of near continuous exercise. Stamina and endurance are therefore essential in the avoidance of injury. A body that fatigues quickly will lead to a breakdown in technique and subsequently stress on structures such as the low back, hamstring

muscles and Achilles tendons.

Functional stability is the next area for consideration. This is defined as the body's ability to meet the load and control demands of the required task. For skiers and snowboarders this equates to maintaining position and posture whilst being able to move in a variety of ways and adapt to rapidly changing situations - all whilst balancing on a very slippery surface! This ability is a combination of muscle strength, core strength and then application of this to functional positions. A deficit in this ability will again lead to technique breakdown and ultimately increase the risk of injury.

Imagine (if you haven't already experienced it!) the heartbreak of your holiday being ruined in the first few days by an injury that could have been avoided. Serious injury on the slopes will often require urgent medical attention, whilst less severe injuries, such as muscle strains, can leave you unable to move and even stiff muscles in your legs can keep you off the slopes for at least a couple of days.

At Tudor Physiotherapy our Chartered Physiotherapists can screen for and assess these potential risks to you as an individual and then provide good advice and targeted exercise programs tailored to your needs. Of course, you may be unlucky and sustain an injury - we can sort this too but prevention is definitely better (and probably cheaper!) than cure. These principles can be applied to the starting of any sporting/exercise pursuit and in the next issue I will give some insight into the pitfalls that lie in wait for the potential runners and cyclists amongst you.

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