



Staying healthy on your Skiing Holiday



General

Skiing holidays have become a regular pastime for many travellers each year. In some cases it is their first venture into an unknown activity and for others it has become a routine part of their yearly activities. Both these groups can potentially face some serious health risks associated with their activity. Following some commonsense rules may make the difference between an uneventful trip or a serious accident which could incapacitate the individual for many months - or worse. Each year a number of deaths also occur due to severe exposure and/or avalanches.

Follow the snow

It may be obvious but the presence of good quality snow is necessary for skiing! Each year it appears that global warming is causing havoc for the ski resorts and it is becoming necessary to go to even higher altitude to find the right conditions. This means that the risks from altitude sickness are being seen more frequently among skiers.

What is 'Altitude Sickness'

This is the series of signs and symptoms which may occur when a person climbs rapidly or is taken quickly to a high altitude. Remember, anything over 10,000ft can be regarded as high altitude. It can affect different people in a variety of ways ranging from **mild headaches** to **sudden death**. Both male and female can succumb and the condition can be seen at any age. Frequently the deaths which occur are in the younger age group who may disregard the early warning signs. The primary problem is the change in the available oxygen concentration at altitude. This makes the body work harder to maintain the necessary levels of oxygen for the cells to work correctly. At sea level the normal oxygen concentration is 21%. At 12,000 ft the amount of oxygen is reduced by 40% and so breathing rate and cardiac activity need to increase to compensate for this deficiency. Unfortunately many of those affected by the condition still push onward - despite the warning signs - and the body just cannot cope with devastating consequences.

Aches & Pains

For the less experienced skier the strain on the major joints of the body can be very significant. It is very important that sufficient muscle building exercises have been carried out before leaving home and also that some professional lessons have been taken regarding the best way to fall to avoid injury - and perhaps also the best way to stop!

Skiing alone

Being by yourself is a risky business. If this is really necessary make certain that you have given a clear itinerary to a responsible person and check in with them regularly. Don't change your itinerary without letting them know. They should have a clear action plan if you miss any of your scheduled contact times.

Wearing the right clothing

Make sure your skis fit correctly and always wear correct **protective clothing** - bright colours (not white!) which will help to identify you at a distance. Carry a small but efficient thermal sheet and even some of the **instant heat packs**. Have some **food** available - at least enough to last a night. A **whistle** may also be very useful to identify your position.

Hypothermia

When the core body temperature drops below a certain level the main bodily functions begin to deteriorate. The main symptoms include inability to think straight, shivering, shallow breathing and a weak pulse. This can be very rapid and under these circumstances an affected skier may make very poor value judgements with serious detrimental consequences.

Ear aches and Skiing

Any traveller with a sinus infection or a middle/inner ear infection should avoid severe cold and also the sudden changes in pressure associated with altitude change.

Keep in contact

Falling and badly twisting an ankle or breaking a bone regularly leads to a skier becoming immobile. If they are alone and without any means of communication they run the serious risk of becoming very ill from frost bite and exposure. In this type of situation, having a working **mobile phone** and an accurate hand-held **GPS apparatus** would save many lives.

Experienced vs Inexperienced

The first time skier will probably stay close to the main party of learners and be introduced to this sport in a gentle and safe fashion. However those with more experience may be tempted to go 'off-piste' and explore. This is where major problems can occur very quickly if **proper protocols** are not followed all the time. Never wander off without telling others and always follow the **safety signs** which should be easily visible. Teenagers have the phenomenal characteristic of thinking their are indestructible!

Alcohol and Skiing

If you plan to ski on a number of days during your holiday be aware that taking too much alcohol at night will impair your judgement the next day and also may increase your risk of hypothermia if you are involved in an accident.

Skiing with the family

Remember children can be too adventurous for their skill level and they are also more prone to the effects of exposure. If travelling with children be very careful to avoid **accidents** associated with the **ski lifts** etc.

First Aid Kit

Having a basic first aid kit makes sense. This will include the ability to treat blisters and minor cuts and well as a support bandage for twisted ankles and wrists. Some paracetamol may also be wise for the muscular aches which are common. However if you are unsure don't treat yourself - seek competent

medical attention.

Travel Insurance

One essential element of any skiing holiday is to ensure that there is adequate **medical insurance** to cover the costs of emergency evacuation from the ski slope to the nearest hospital, from there to a specialist centre and even onwards to the home destination. This will not be covered by the standard 'travel insurance' and cover for detailed adventure sports will be needed.

Take Care, be Sensible

Remember this leaflet can only give very general information. Every individual planning this type of holiday must take care with their plans and ensure that they are also physically fit for the trip. Detailed information on all countries is available at www.tmb.ie



National Travel Vaccine Appointment Tel 1-850-48 76 74

Web Address: www.tmb.ie

This leaflet has been prepared using information supplied from W.H.O. Center for Disease Control (US) and other International sources.

- ✓ Travel Accessories
- ✓ Tropical Diagnostic Laboratory
- ✓ Tropical Disease Screening Centre
- ✓ W.H.O. registered Yellow Fever Vaccination Centre
- ✓ International Vaccination and Malaria Advice Centres

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