

READY TO SKI? Protect Your Knees

by Alison Ganong, MD, Tahoe Center for Orthopedics



Every year, 17,500 skiers cut their seasons short when they tear their MCLs or ACLs. These injuries hurt, and recovery can take a long time. Read on to learn how to avoid them.

Before the Season

Get your legs in ski shape. Our desk-job lifestyles leave our lower bodies a little misshapen. We sit in chairs all day, and that tightens up our hips while weakening our rear leg muscles.

While squats and lunges help, balance that work with hip stretches and deadlifts. You want your quad muscles in front of your legs to be about as strong as the hamstring muscles behind them.

Skiers should also practice single-leg balancing. Simply stand on one foot for 30 seconds at a time. Even better: Try single-leg squats.

The leg strength you build will improve your stability. That's great for your knees.

During Your Runs

Know your skill level. Don't let your pride get you hurt. Stay off tough courses if you don't have the experience to handle them.

One sign that you're out of your depth: Your form starts to suffer. You should be able to comfortably maintain an aggressive, forward-leaning posture. If the grade intimidates you, you'll unconsciously hang back a little. Sit back too far, you'll tumble backward, and that's how you may tear an ACL.

Listen to your body. Many skiers get hurt when their energy levels drop. So observe how you feel. Stay fed. Stay hydrated. Recognize when you need to rest.

Know how to fall. You can't avoid every fall. If you feel one coming and you can't stop it, don't resist. Learn to fall into your momentum.

It's our instinct to lean away or twist ourselves sideways to slow down. But herky-jerky movements like that put too much tension on our knee ligaments—and then, sometimes they snap.

When to See Us

In spite of all your preparation, you may still get hurt. MCL and ACL injuries come with similar symptoms: pain, swelling, and a feeling of instability around the knee.

A torn MCL will usually get better with therapy, but an ACL injury often requires surgery. The two injuries can happen together, and only an MRI can truly tell them apart. So it's important to call your doctor for a diagnosis.



Sports Medicine That Keeps You Moving

Alison Ganong, MD, specializes in sports medicine and rehabilitation, and she travels with the U.S. ski team as their physician. Dr. Ganong cares for patients at the Tahoe Center for Orthopedics, located in South Lake Tahoe, California, and Incline Village, Nevada. For more information about sports medicine treatment options, call **530.543.5554**.