

# Health Hints

## For Safer Winter Sports, Watch Your Feet

(NAPSA)—From the downhill rush of snow skiing to placid casual skating, cold-weather sports provide a fast track for fun and cardiovascular health. But colder temperatures and the exhilarating speeds attained during such sports can also expose your feet and ankles to debilitating injuries.

“Healthy feet and ankles, which act together as accelerators, steering, brakes and shock absorbers in winter sports, are not only crucial to success in competition, but also help keep the body upright and out of the emergency room. Any problems with the foot or ankle could have serious repercussions for winter sports participants,” said Dr. Ronald D. Jensen, president of the American Podiatric Medical Association.

Here are a few tips to help avoid foot problems:

- **Keep feet warm and dry.** Proper footwear—insulated, waterproof boots or shoes—is as important as coats, hats or gloves during cold weather. Podiatric physicians recommend a single pair of thick socks made of a poly-cotton blend, which wicks away moisture. In subfreezing temperatures, feet are in immediate danger of frostbite, a serious, painful condition that can result in loss of toes.

- **Make sure footwear fits properly.** Podiatric physicians specializing in sports medicine say properly fitted ski boots and skates are the single most important factor in safe and successful skiing and skating. Without a snug and accurate fit, the pressure exerted by the constant forward motion and lateral movement of skiing and quick turns of skating can result in discomfort or injury.



**Stretching helps to prevent muscle pulls and tears and prepares the muscles for the constant “forward lean” stress of skiing and skating.**

If boots and skates are too loose, toes quickly get irritated in the toe box, and tight footwear may inhibit circulation of the blood vessels of the lower extremity and cause cold feet. If you are not sure if your ski boots or skates fit properly, or if your current pair hurts your feet, take them to a podiatrist, who can evaluate the fit and make recommendations to improve both comfort and performance.

- **Stretch before and after participating in any winter sport.** Stretching lower limbs adequately helps to prevent muscle pulls and tears and prepares the muscles for the flexing required by some winter sports.

Without proper stretching first, the motion can result in painful Achilles tendinitis and plantar fasciitis, among other problems. A podiatric physician can recommend proper stretching exercises.

For more information, visit [www.apma.org](http://www.apma.org).