

Winter Sports

A guide for people with heart conditions

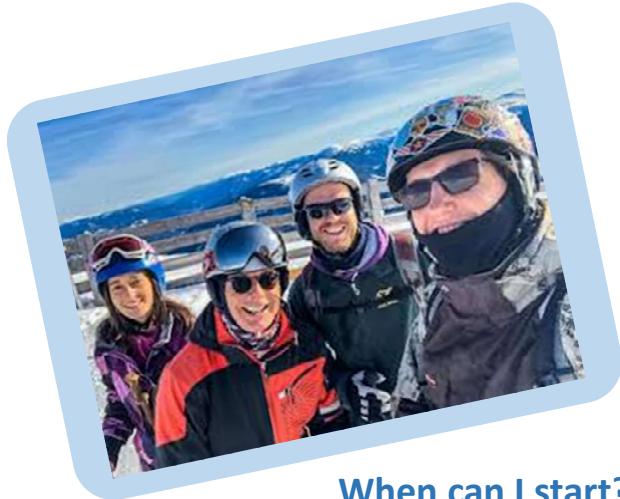


ACPICR

Association of Chartered Physiotherapists
In Cardiovascular Rehabilitation

This leaflet covers common cold weather sports, exercising in winter conditions and other considerations whether participating in the UK or holidaying abroad.

Winter sports include [skiing](#), [snow boarding](#), [ice skating](#), [curling](#) and many more.



What are the specific benefits?

Many winter sports are sociable.

Winter sports can maintain or improve

- Aerobic fitness & cardiovascular health
- Strength
- Balance & co-ordination
- Psychological wellbeing



When can I start?

When you can start depends on your cardiac diagnosis as well as your general health and any co-existing medical conditions you may have.

If you have had open heart surgery and/or an implantable device (such as a pacemaker) you may be advised to wait until you are healed, which may be a few months. It is important you are healed well enough to cope with any knocks or falls which may happen.

It is important to inform your cardiovascular rehabilitation (CR) team that you wish to do winter sports so they can help you plan a suitable individual exercise programme to prepare.



How can I get in shape?

Most winter sports require a good level of fitness. This may be something you need to work towards with your cardiac rehab team.

Strength training may be particularly helpful.

Do you have the strength to get up if you fall over? Will you need to use a manual ski lift? Are you able to get your footwear on and off? How are you getting to your route?

Think about if there are any specific tasks and practice these activities before starting your sport.

There may be ways to make tasks easier such as using a resort bus.

How should I feel during my session?

It is very important that you know how to exercise safely and effectively.

Winter sports can vary in the effort they require. Get advice from your CR team as to whether low, moderate or high intensity is appropriate for you

Stop exercising if you experience any chest pain, palpitations, dizziness or light-headedness. If the symptoms do not go away promptly with rest and/or GTN spray/tablets seek medical advice as soon as possible.

You should feel your breathing rate has increased but you should still feel comfortable and able to continue. It is fine to feel that you are exerting yourself so long as you are not struggling. As with any activity, start low and go slow, build up gradually and pace yourself.

Perhaps start with an easier level and build up the time you are exercising for over a few sessions.

What about a warm up and cool down?

Ideally the first 15 minutes and last 10 minutes of the session should be performed at a lower intensity. A warm up and cool down allows your heart rate and blood pressure to rise gradually as the exercise intensity increases and then fall gradually as it decreases as you finish your session.

Warm up. This could involve stretches and a cardiovascular warm up such as walking for a minimum of 15 minutes. The exercise should feel 'light' intensity.

Cool down. Minimum of 10 minutes. You could cool down by doing the sport slower or walking for 10 mins. Gradually lower the intensity until you feel completely recovered.

You can also incorporate stretching exercises into the cool down whilst your muscles are still warm.



Other things to consider

- Avoid holding your breath
- Cold weather will increase energy demands on your body which can make exercise more demanding at a lighter intensity. So start gentle and see how that feels.
- Exercise only when you feel well
- Dress appropriately
- Don't exercise straight after eating a large meal
- Remember to keep hydrated
- Don't try to compete with others, stick to your own pace
- Some cardiac medications make it difficult for your body to adjust its temperature which could make it harder to warm up and cool down.
- Altitude may affect people with heart failure, those who have had a heart attack recently and those with lower fitness levels. Your heart will be working harder at rest and on exercise. For further guidance speak to your heart failure team or cardiac rehab team.

Jacuzzis, steam rooms and saunas can affect your blood pressure. When first using them do so only for a couple of minutes. Increase the time gradually up to a maximum of 10 minutes. If you have any symptoms e.g. dizziness or palpitations then these environments are probably not suitable for you. Remember to drink plenty of water and never use the cold plunge or cold shower before or afterwards



Stop exercising if you experience any chest discomfort, palpitations, dizziness or light-headedness. If the symptoms do not go away promptly with rest and/ or your GTN spray/tablets, seek medical advice as soon as possible.

This guidance is based on available evidence and expert opinion.

Produced by the Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Cardiovascular Rehabilitation

This leaflet is not intended to replace the advice that your doctor or cardiovascular rehabilitation team give you based on their expert knowledge of your condition.

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