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For Ski Injury Prevention Conditioning is Key

Greenwich, CT – *January 31, 2009* - Each year eager skiers and snowboarders take to the slopes to get the most from the winter sports season but many do little to prepare for the physical demands of their sport. Even the best athletes will suffer when under-prepared muscles meet the extreme stresses of winter sports activity for the first time in many months. Physical conditioning can make all the difference.

According to orthopedist Steven Hindman, M.D. of Orthopaedic and Neurosurgery Specialists (ONS), a lot can be done to avoid the common aches and more serious strains to joints and muscles that many experience. “Most people go from their car to the lift without even as a single stretch,” says Hindman. “Skiing requires using muscles and muscle groups that are used very little the rest of the year. Ideally, strengthening and conditioning should begin two to three months before the first trip up the mountain, but it’s never too late to benefit from a program. Find one that’s geared to winter mountain sports. If you don’t prepare, your risk for injury increases.”

The injury most feared by skiers is a torn ACL, (anterior cruciate ligament.) One of four ligaments in the knee, the ACL can tear when a skier tries to recover from a fall where his weight drops backward over the ski tails, triggering the skis to shoot forward putting excessive stress on the ACL. The injury usually requires surgery and a lengthy recuperation. Conditioning can play an important role in ACL injury prevention. Strengthening both the upper and lower leg muscles helps stabilize the knee during stress situations.

Conditioning should consist of building muscular endurance and increasing strength to maintain good balance and resist fatigue throughout a day of activity. The major leg muscles work the hardest when skiing or snowboarding. Exercises should focus on strengthening thighs, hamstrings, calves and hips, while improving flexibility and stamina. Yoga, which develops strength, flexibility, balance and breathing works well for many people. Pilates, a deep muscle exercise system can improve core body strength and flexibility.

Equipment safety is another factor in injury prevention, according to Dr. Hindman. No matter how new your equipment, improperly set bindings can trigger an injury if they fail to release at a critical moment. Make sure binding tensions are adjusted regularly.

Ultimately, fatigue is the most common cause of skiing and snowboarding accidents. "Most injuries happen after 2 p.m. in the afternoon due to muscle fatigue, flat light and deteriorating snow conditions. When you get tired, stop," recommends Dr. Hindman.

Orthopaedic and Neurosurgery Specialists PC (ONS) is the largest multi-specialty orthopaedic and neurosurgery practice in Fairfield and Westchester counties. ONS physicians provide expertise in all musculoskeletal conditions and injuries, sports medicine, minimally invasive orthopaedic and spine surgery, joint replacement and trauma. For more information, please visit www.onsmd.com or call (203) 869 1145.