

Mountains in winter: The doctor's advice

Cold weather and snow: snow lovers are all on the ski slopes. But don't forget that skiing, like many other sports, requires some simple precautions regarding equipment, athletic training, and diet, as well as respect for some basic rules of politeness and safety.

Ski wear High up in the mountain weather conditions are different from those we are accustomed to and they can change suddenly: therefore you need to consult weather and snow reports before going to ski or on excursions. You can brave weather variability by wearing layers: an old mountain guides' suggestion says, "in the mountains eat a sandwich less and wear a sweater more"; never forget to bring waterproof gloves and a hat.

Diet Cold and its complications can be prevented with a balanced diet rich in carbohydrates, which provide energy and are easily digestible, to be consumed mainly at breakfast (bread, biscuits, rusks, fruit, honey, and jam) and for lunch (pasta, rice or "polenta", a thick mush made of cornmeal boiled in water or stock). Do not drink any alcoholics during the day: they lessen attention and cause heat dispersion through peripheral vasodilatation.

Exposure and frostbite When exposure and frostbite occur, the first thing to do, while waiting for a doctor, is to try to re-establish a normal body temperature, by carrying the patient to the nearest place that is sheltered from wind (a mountain hut or chalet), taking off his/her wet clothes and replacing them with warm and dry ones. Avoid the following actions: friction with snow, as it increases the dispersion of residual heat; heating by direct sources of heat such as fire or car exhausts of which the temperature cannot be controlled and may cause burns, the crushing of blisters - if any; giving alcoholics.

Sun Wear sunscreen and lip balm to avoid sunburn: it is important to protect your skin and lips, which are particularly sensitive to the effects of cold weather. Do not forget to protect your eyes by wearing sunglasses with UV absorbing lenses and broad temple arms against "stray light" and wind from the sides, protecting you from cold.

Mountain Sickness People who climb or travel higher than 2,000 metres of altitude can suffer from alterations of the cardiovascular system which may manifest as palpitations, tiredness, breathlessness, and headaches. These symptoms can be prevented by an ad hoc training and a gradual ascent. If they occur, immediate accompanied descent is essential, together with rest and good hydration. People suffering from high blood pressure should avoid sudden changes in temperature.

In shape on the ski slopes An ad hoc training before going on the slopes is important to prevent traumas, specially those associated with the knee. You should start training two months before leaving to get in good shape for your mountain holidays: training should be targeted at improving articular strength, flexibility and mobility, including a first stage aerobic training to improve breathing, agility and quickness of reflex (jogging, skipping, bicycle) and a second anaerobic stage to improve arms and especially legs muscle power.

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