

Safety

Shots

Safety is no Accident!

Ski and Ride Safety Equipment

Linda Johnston

When it comes to alpine skiing and snowboarding, safety is paramount. As a high-speed sport performed on challenging, often unpredictable terrain, it's crucial to equip oneself with the right gear to minimize the risks. The most essential piece of safety equipment for skiers and riders is the helmet. Helmets protect the head during falls, collisions, and other impacts that can occur during skiing and riding. Modern helmets are designed with advanced materials like EPS foam and polycarbonate shells that absorb energy from impacts, providing both comfort and protection. Many ski helmets also feature adjustable ventilation systems to regulate temperature and enhance comfort.

An important aspect of alpine skiing safety is the use of proper ski bindings. These devices are responsible for connecting the skier's boots to the skis, and they play a vital role in reducing the risk of injury in the event of a fall. Bindings are designed to release when the skier falls or experiences an excessive amount of force, preventing potential injury to the knees or other parts of the body. It is crucial to ensure that ski bindings are correctly adjusted to fit your skill level, weight, and skiing conditions to ensure they function properly.

Goggles are also an indispensable part of snow sports safety. They protect the eyes from snow, wind, and ultraviolet (UV) radiation. Goggles also help improve visibility in poor weather conditions, such as fog or snow, which can significantly enhance the ability to navigate the slopes safely.

Proper clothing is important for safety in alpine skiing and riding, as well. Ski or snowboard jackets and pants that are both waterproof and insulated help keep the skier or rider warm

and dry, even in extreme weather conditions. Base layers that wick moisture away from the body are also important for maintaining warmth and comfort.

In addition to the standard safety equipment for alpine skiing and riding, avalanche safety gear is critical when skiing in backcountry areas or off-piste terrain, where the risk of avalanches is higher. Avalanches can occur suddenly and with little warning, making it essential to carry the right equipment to prevent and respond to such emergencies. Equipment includes an avalanche transceiver, a probe, a shovel, and airbags. See my article on avalanche safety for more information.

What is most important is that safety equipment items help mitigate the inherent risks of downhill snow sports, allowing skiers and riders to focus on enjoying the sport while staying as safe as possible.

Linda Johnston is a long-time skier and ski club activist and has led many group trips to ski destinations in North and South America. She raised her two sons on Arizona and Colorado ski hills. Linda is a doctor of physical therapy, practicing in orthopedics for over 40 years in Phoenix, Arizona.