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Don't let your skiing skills go downhill

By Anne Z. Cooke and Steve Haggerty, Special to the Times
Published January 30, 2007

KEYSTONE RESORT, Colo. - You used to be a pretty good skier: You learned when you were a kid and you had skied regularly since then. But now, well, you're older. So, can you keep on going?

Yes, as long as you don't let a lifetime of hard-won skills melt away. Here's how to get your groove back.

Exercise before you go

Yes, the dreaded eight-letter word. But you don't have to start a year in advance or even join a gym. You can start exercising just a month ahead:

Do deep knee bends while you're waiting for the coffee to drip, hoist 3-pound hand weights while watching the evening news, or skip rope in the driveway.

Stretch while you're on the phone. Walk more, jog, bike, climb stairs or do yoga. Staying active as part of your daily routine will improve your skiing - and your lifestyle.

But if you concede to yourself that you have been too sedentary, then it's worth hiring a personal trainer for the tuneup - and to learn exercises you can do on your own the rest of your life.

Join a ski club

There are several clubs in the bay area, and they all do one great thing: They organize affordable ski trips, getting you there more often than you would on your own. And when you ski often, you ski better.

The clubs handle all of the work and most of the headaches involved in finding and booking lodging, organizing bus and air transportation and reserving lift tickets. They get good group rates, which means discounts for everything from rentals to some meals.

Best of all, you'll meet like-minded people. And that is, after all, part of the joy of skiing.

Go for a week

Why are ski instructors, lift operators and resort bartenders such hotshots on skis? Not because they're more athletic than the rest of us. It's because they ski for an hour or two (or three) nearly every day, from December through March. And the more they do it, the better they get.

Chances are you'll get more out of a one-week ski trip than from a long weekend. It's like going to the gym: You get into a routine. You tweak and strengthen those special leg muscles that control the skis. And you improve balance and stamina.

Bring your own boots

Don't rent ski boots. Buy a good midpriced pair (\$250 to \$350) that fit your feet; they should last a half-dozen winters, perhaps longer.

If they're properly fitted, you'll always be comfortable. And with good boots, you won't need to buy skis. Rent them. It's a great way to sample the newest technology.

Start with a lesson

To keep your engine running, start with a tune-up. Muscle memory fades without regular reinforcement. And a lesson is the best way to begin. To get the most benefit, make it a private or semiprivate lesson - not a group lesson - and take it on the first day of your ski vacation. You'll have the rest of the week to improve, and time for a second lesson, if need be.

Ski every day

That's right, even if you wake up feeling stiff.

But do it as the Europeans do, meaning shorter days. North American skiers tend to hit the slopes like an invading army, rushing the lifts when they open, inhaling hamburgers at lunch and slogging on until the last lift closes.

To most Europeans, skiing isn't a sport but a pleasure outing. It includes bursts of speed,

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scenic rest stops and gulps of fresh air sweetened by good food, fine wine and agreeable companions.

Start skiing at 10 a.m., stop for lunch at 2 p.m., and quit early. Then head for the hot tub for a long restorative soak.

Freelance writers Anne Z. Cooke and Steve Haggerty live in Marina Del Rey, Calif.

Contacts

Ski buddies

Ski clubs in Tampa Bay typically offer membership rates for singles or families, and the clubs hold social gatherings in addition to their package-discount ski trips. For more information, contact:

- The Clearwater/St. Petersburg Ski & Sports Club; www.snowshark.org.
- The Tampa Bay Snow Skiers and Boarders; www.tampabaysnowskiers.com/toc1.htm.
- Nancy Reyelt, who has skied on several continents, offers trips through her Rendezvous Ski Club, Naples. Rendezvous does not charge a membership fee. Reyelt can be contacted by calling toll-free 1-800-639-3162.

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