



# Safety on the slopes

Preventing some snowy sports injuries

BY PERRIE SAMOTIN  
psamotin@am-ny.com

Whether you're an avid participant in winter sports or just partake on occasion, injuries — even basic ones — can occur. One of the most common snowboarding injuries is a wrist fracture, caused by falling incorrectly at a high speed, while skiing accidents are a common cause of skier's thumb — an injury of the tissue or ligament that connects the bones of your thumb.

There's no foolproof way to avoid getting banged up, but there are preventative steps you can take.

We talked to Dr. Mark E. Pruzansky, director of the Manhattan-based Hand-Sport Surgery Institute, about how to stay safe the next time you take to the slopes.

## Preventing skier's thumb

**1. Know your limits:** When it comes to skiing, common sense is key. "You have to know your ability to handle different kinds of terrain and stay within your limits," said Pruzansky.

**2. Choose simple poles:** Forget about those high-tech ski poles on the market and stick to simple finger-groove grips that

## KNOW THE SIGNS

### Symptoms of both conditions include:

- Pain/swelling
- Stiffness
- Reduced mobility/motion of thumbs or wrists
- Bluish discoloration under the skin. This may take a few days to appear.

are easy to release, recommended Pruzansky. Also, if you choose to rock wrist straps, keep them loose.

**3. Quick release:** You feel as if you're about to fall — what should you do? "Release your poles as

soon as possible," Pruzansky said.

"Then lean on your uphill side with your hands in front of you and above your knees," he said. Avoid falling backward or sideways on your hands.



## Preventing snowboarding wrist fractures

**1. Fall right:** The best way to avoid a wrist fracture is to learn to fall correctly, says Pruzansky. "Fall either on your backside or onto your forearms.

Because both feet are affixed to the same board in snowboarding, the natural — and most dangerous — reaction is to outstretch your hand to stop a fall, which puts you at risk for a fractured wrist," he said.

**2. Use protection:** It's crucial to always wear a pair of snowboarding wrist guards to reduce the risk of injuries in case falls do happen.

**3. Practice, practice, practice:** Much like surfing or even learning how to ride a bike, balancing on a board takes some solid practice. According to Pruzansky, wrist injuries are most likely to happen to beginners who haven't mastered their balance. "Practice falling and going down easy slopes before you tackle more difficult inclines," he said.