



## It's all about balance

By Lisa Ryckman

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If you want to get in shape to make it down the mountain, take a tip from an expert: Stand on one foot.

When it comes to skiing and boarding, balance makes perfect, says ski fitness coach Lisa Marie Mercer, owner of Mountain Sport Pilates and Fitness in Frisco and author of a winter sport conditioning book, *Open Your Heart With Winter Fitness*.

"Practice balance whenever possible," she says. "Stand on one foot while waiting on line. To activate your core, for 10 seconds, 10 times a day, draw your abdominal muscles inwards. Hold for 10 seconds."

Mercer suggests a combination of Pilates and core work for a workout that really hits the right muscles.

Pilates, a series of specific exercises and focused breathing techniques that strengthen the body and lengthen muscles, has always been a favorite of dancers. It's now being added to the training regimens of a wide variety of athletes and is used to speed the physical rehabilitation process.

"Pilates helps correct postural misalignment," Mercer says. "By correcting posture, you can also correct muscular imbalances. Also, Pilates is based on the concept of using your core muscles, which are responsible for balance. Balance is essential for snow-sport skills."

Mercer says to look for a Pilates instructor trained in one of the more modern techniques, such as Stott or Polestar, which allow for more helpful modifications than the classic Pilates technique.

"I've seen the most dramatic results with people who study with the more progressive Pilates instructors - the ones who make use of balance-training equipment such as the ball and Bosu," she says.

"Unlike the traditional Pilates equipment, these balance devices have unpredictable movement patterns. If you're not using your core, or if you are working with poor alignment, the apparatus won't move in the desired direction."

As proof that her method works, Mercer says her students are virtually impervious to injury during the ski season, and the baby boomers in the group have seen other benefits.

"Many of my students are over 50," she says, "but they can ski the younger kids under the table."

For more information about Mercer and her classes, go to [mountain-sportfitness.com](http://mountain-sportfitness.com) and [-skifitness.net](http://-skifitness.net).

#### **Get into ski shape Ski fitness guru Lisa Marie Mercer's Top 10 tips:**

- \* Practice balance exercise.
- \* Work your hamstrings.
- \* Avoid the leg extension machine: It contributes to hamstring/quad muscle imbalances, and can possibly lead to shearing forces, which can in turn make you susceptible to ACL (knee) injury.
- \* Don't wait until the last minute. Practice balance training year-round.
- \* Practice multimuscle exercises that work the arms and legs simultaneously.
- \* Avoid excessive stretching prior to skiing or snowboarding. Excessive stretching can weaken the muscle and make it susceptible to injury.
- \* Foam roller massage is great to get rid of that after-ski tension.
- \* Buy a stability ball.

- \* Practice exercises that promote dynamic balance, which is balance in motion.
- \* Do agility exercises.
- \* Get more ideas at [skifitness.net](http://skifitness.net) and [mountainsportfitness.com](http://mountainsportfitness.com)

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