



Right about now many of us are thinking two things—“Summer sure went by quickly,” and, “Bring on the snow!” As we begin to wind down some of our summertime activities due to changes in daylight and the weather, it is a great time to begin conditioning for winter activities. Beginning now will help you to avoid some of the start-of-the-season re-conditioning and ensure you are ready for when the snow truly begins to fly.

The balancing act. Whether we are thinking about flying down alpine slopes, skate-skiing, snowboarding, snowshoeing, or heading into the backcountry, balance is an essential component of our performance. The better we can control our balance, the less likely we are to fall whether we are walking the icy streets of Girdwood or playing in the snow. Most of us assume we have good balance because...well...we can stand on our own two feet and don't fall over very often. Try this test—stand with your hands hanging comfortably at your side, then lift one foot. Are you able to maintain your upright position or do you look for a countertop or wall to hold onto? If you are able to maintain your balance, try lifting yourself up onto your toes, see how you do.

To improve our balance we can do some simple, no-equipment required exercises. The first exercise focuses on the core and is called the plank. Lie on the floor on your belly. Lift your chest off the floor by bringing your elbows under your shoulders (sometimes called the “TV-watching” position). Inhale, and as you exhale, lift your hips off of the floor, draw your belly button in towards your spine. Create a strong, straight line from your shoulders down to your heels. Hold for 10 seconds. Make sure that you do not hold your breath during this exercise. Another way to do the plank is to get into push-up position (with elbows extended or the “up” position) and hold for 10 seconds. Important things to look for with both of these is that you have a straight line from shoulders to heels (no bending in the middle) and that you continue to breathe during the exercise.

The legs and glutes. Many of us spend weeks prior to ski season doing squats and lunges to strengthen our glutes, quads and hamstrings. Excellent exercises that build strength and force us to practice our balance. For a little extra work, try single-leg squats. Stand on one leg, hands at your side or on your hips. Activate your core (pull your belly button back towards your spine). Lift the right leg off the floor so that the right foot moves out in front of your body. Bend the left knee and flex forward slightly at the hips but keep chest up. Squat down as deep as you can with good control, maintaining heel contact with floor and watching hip and knee alignment. Return to starting position and repeat.

Don't forget the calves. The often neglected, smaller cousins of our giant thigh muscles, the calves are also important for our balancing abilities. So, don't forget to throw in a few calf raises as you work on your legs. And, again, for additional balance training, try doing calf raises (just lift yourself onto your toes in a standing position) while balancing on one foot at a time. It's a great way to activate your core and test your balance. As



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your working through these, remember that balance comes from the core muscles. Using your arms for balance is cheating—try to do this exercise with your arms relaxed at your sides.

Enjoy the season and get outside and play!