

# HOW TO SKI EFFICIENTLY

Tips for making the most of the ski muscles you've got

Ah, the unsung joys of skiing. Ill-timed calf cramps, quads laden with lactic acid, hamstrings that won't allow you to walk fully upright. The hallmarks of an avid skier, right? Well, maybe. While skiing more often or participating in some sort of fitness plan will strengthen your ski muscles, there's a lot to be said for optimizing how you ski so that you're operating as efficiently as possible. Skiing, particularly off-groomed dynamic skiing, is a demanding sport. That's part of what makes it fun and we wouldn't want to diminish that. But still, there is much you can do to refine the way you ski so that you're spending less energy balancing and recovering, leaving more energy for



BY KARIN KIRK

you are in your skiing, the less work you'll do. The more time you spend in a squat position, the quicker you're going to get tired. Not only that, a taller stance yields other benefits to your technique as well.

How tall is tall enough? Due to the forward lean in your boots, you can't actually straighten your legs all the way, and you wouldn't want to anyway. Strive for a position where your knees and hips are as open as they can be to still give you an athletic, "stacked" stance. All you need is a slight flex in each joint – no more than that. Want a quick stance check? Stand sideways in front of the lodge windows and steal a glance at your reflection. Is your weight centered over your feet? Is any one joint flexed more than the others? And while you're at it, how's your outfit?



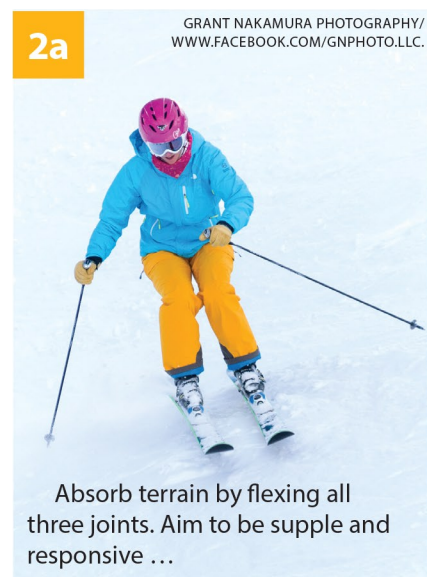
**STANCE CHECK:** weight is centered over the feet while having only a slight bend in the knees and hips. The outfit is good too.

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the exciting parts: railing around the groomers, bouncing off bumps, and hauling yourself up the Ridge bootpack.

## 1. STAND UP!

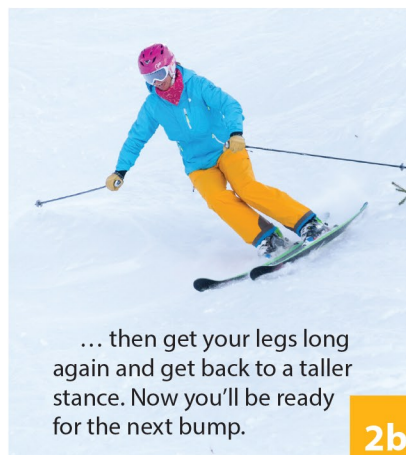
Suppose you're waiting in a long line to buy an iPhone 8 (Hint: skip the phone and buy pow skis instead). What's the least tiring way to stand? Standing straight up is easiest, right? That way your legs are right underneath you, supporting your weight like structural columns. I don't think many people would opt to stand around in a squat or a wall-sit position because that's tons of work. And yet, plenty of us ski that way. So the simple take-home message is this: the taller



Absorb terrain by flexing all three joints. Aim to be supple and responsive ...

## 2. LENGTHEN YOUR BODY IN BETWEEN THE BUMPS

Another advantage of a tall stance is that it maximizes your ability to absorb uneven terrain. When you see a big mogul coming, you need to retract your legs underneath you and absorb the bump. But if you're already crunched up, you haven't got much room left to absorb, hence the shock of the bump sends you backwards. Sound familiar? So stand tall, like a slightly coiled spring, and be ready to compress when needed. Oh, and don't forget to un-coil and get back to your tall stance when you've passed over the bump. Because almost certainly there will be another one looming ahead.



... then get your legs long again and get back to a taller stance. Now you'll be ready for the next bump.

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## 3. UN-BEND YOUR LEGS

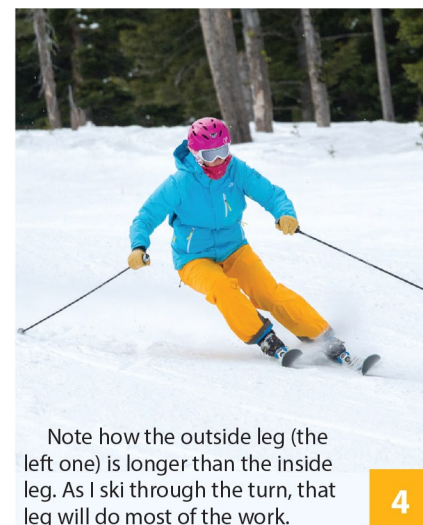
Sometimes when things get aggro we find ourselves hunching down and getting progressively lower and squattier throughout the run. It feels powerful and gnar, but in reality you're burning extra energy all the way down the hill. Every now and then you need to hit that 'reset' button and get yourself back to a tall stance to restore your power. This is especially true if you're wearing a heavy pack or dealing with tricky snow.

There are many ways to get your legs long while in the midst of a run. One way is to lengthen your body at the same time you're swinging your pole forward into your next turn. This is a natural time to relax your grip on the edges, get your weight back over your feet, and direct your energy toward the next turn. As you move into the new turn, let your body lengthen and relax. Once you're into the new turn, flex down only as much as the terrain dictates. Crouching lower doesn't necessarily add power to your skiing, but it does demand more energy. Another way to regain your full height is to pop off a bump and let your legs go long in the air. Strive to land on the balls of your feet, and to maintain the length that you gained in the air. (Bonus: this move looks cool.)



The funnest way to regain a tall stance. Pop off a bump and let your legs go long in the air.

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Note how the outside leg (the left one) is longer than the inside leg. As I ski through the turn, that leg will do most of the work.

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## 4. USE YOUR OUTSIDE LEG AS YOUR PRIMARY STRUCTURAL SUPPORT

You can't stand tall on your skis all the time, because you still need to flex, absorb, and drive your way through the turn. But you can still enjoy the benefits of strong, structural support. Your outside leg will naturally be longer than your inside leg, and it's the place you should be directing most of your weight. Try to keep that outside leg long and strong, and feel the benefits of stacking up efficiently over the outside ski. This has the added advantage of pressuring the ski that does most of the work to carve and shape your turn.

## STAY OVER YOUR FEET!

This one goes without saying, but I'll say it anyway. If you tend to ski in the back seat, you're working really hard, all the time. If you can't get your weight over your feet, then you won't be able to stand up tall, you can't absorb terrain, and if you pop off a bump you will land on your tails and the skis will jet out from under you, which looks silly in your GoPro footage. In short, you are spending most of your energy working to regain balance and catch up to your skis. Lots of people are impressively capable at skiing with their weight too far back. It can work, but it's the antithesis of efficiency. So slow down a bit and work on staying centered – this practice will pay huge dividends in the long haul.

Give some of these tips a try and see if you can feel the benefit of skiing stronger and staying fresher throughout the day. If it works, I'll meet you in the bar for a high-five. But not until the lifts are closed and you've milked every drop of fun from your ski day. ♦

*Karin Kirk is a ski instructor, staff trainer, and Ridge guide at Bridger Bowl. A balanced diet, balanced stance, and matchy outfit are all part of her goals for this season. She can be reached at [karin@kirkframeworks.com](mailto:karin@kirkframeworks.com).*