

Boot Fitting – Tips for Comfort and Performance

Regardless of whether you're a first time skier or well seasoned expert, seeking out a good boot fit can sometimes feel like searching for a needle in a haystack. But, with a little perseverance and a good boot fitter you can achieve both comfort and performance from your boots. This article will cover what to look for in a good boot fit, describe what a good match feels like, and explain why this will improve your skiing whether you're renting or upgrading your existing equipment.

Ski boots are designed to fit more snugly than your street shoes. You want your heel and foot held firmly in place and the boot cuff snug around your calf without gaps. The pressure on your foot should be comfortably snug, like a firm handshake. Wearing a ski specific sock and keeping all clothing outside the boot, will help keep your feet warm and comfortable.

Often layering socks, wearing thick socks, or tucking your clothing into the boots (including thermal underwear) will create pressure points and decrease circulation to your feet. You may need to cut your thermal underwear or wear ones that have an elastic ankle in order to comfortably pull them above the boot cuff. Check that all layers of your ski pants are over the outside of the boot as well.

Sometimes people make the mistake of getting a boot that's too big because their toes touched the front of the boot when they tried it on, and they asked for a bigger size. Don't forget to flex forward and push your shin against the boot tongue when you try on boots. This motion slides the foot backward into the correct position giving your toes more room.

If you rent boots you may have to try on more than one pair to find a good fit. Don't leave the boot fitting area if your feet are uncomfortable. You can't learn to ski or improve your skiing with an uncomfortable or poorly performing boot fit. Rental boots come in a variety of styles: rear entry, 3 or 4 buckles, and some even have battery powered heaters or an option that allows the boot cuff to move more freely while walking. If you own special foot beds or custom orthotics, use these in place of the stock foot bed in your rental boot.

The real test to a good boot fit will come on the hill. If after walking around with your skis on for a while your feet feel unusually cold, numb, or tingly, or your toes bang against the front of the boot, or your feet slide around, or your heel lifts, you may need to re-buckle the boots. If you're taking a lesson ask your instructor for help. If the problem persists have an experienced boot fitter check your feet for common foot anomalies. They may recommend a different boot or make a few quick modifications using off-the-shelf fitting aids. You may find that certain rental shops only carry one model or don't offer boots specifically sized for women. Call ahead if you want to ensure you'll have options.

If you own your boots and want a more customized fit consider scheduling an appointment with an experienced boot fitter. There are endless ways to customize ski boots for your feet. Whether you spend a couple of days or an entire season in your boots you'll benefit from the changes. Here's a partial list of the services an experienced boot fitter can offer: customized foot beds & foam liners, grinding or heat molding, boot heaters, and off-the-shelf fitting aids. In addition, they can observe your stance and lower leg alignment to determine if the boots or foot beds need adjustment.

Taking a lesson with a professional ski instructor can help identify whether your technique or boot fit/alignment problems are hindering your improvement.

Modern equipment is designed to complement ski instruction by making learning to ski and improving easier and with less effort than in the past. If any of the following problems sound familiar, you may want to consider taking a lesson and seeing an experienced boot fitter. Common problems are: having difficulty changing direction, frequently catching an edge, feeling stuck on your inside edges, or can't seem to master the transition to parallel.

A boot that is comfortable but fits snugly will help you control where, when, and how quickly you turn the ski. It will also give you more control of how you use the edges which will help you ski varied terrain more confidently. Remember, whether you rent or plan to buy take your time trying different models and make sure you have the correct size. Unless you anticipate a rapid growth spurt in your feet, buying a pair of ski boots that you can customize is a great investment you won't regret!

