

## **ALWAYS WEAR A HELMET, HOWEVER: HELMETS DON'T ALWAYS GUARANTEE BRAIN SAFETY IN A SKI ACCIDENT**



*Those suffering a brain bleed on the slopes often do not realize they are injured. Companions should call the ski patrol immediately, get the person to the clinic ASAP, and do not take 'no' for an answer. Courtesy photo.*

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*Editor's Note: This is the third in a four-part series on safe skiing, prompted by the news that there are more than 600,000 ski-related injuries annually. In Colorado this ski season there have already been four ski-related deaths reported. Colorado and the Western Slope are world-renowned for skiing. The Mirror serves the region that skis at Telluride, Crested Butte and Powderhorn.*

MONTROSE – You religiously wear your ski helmet and you're safe, right? It's a common belief. Not necessarily true. . .

Skiing can involve high speeds down steep hills, and even "Blue or steeper green slopes can generate enough kinetic energy to inflict lethal force, even when wearing a helmet, if you come to an abrupt stop and hit your head or torso on a solid object," says Montrose's Randy White, safe skiing advocate. White's watch dog group Safe Skiing Advo-

cates (SSA) is pushing for all ski areas to thoroughly educate skiers on safety and to have a ski patrol and law officer presence on the slopes so that impaired, high, or out-of-control skiers and snowboarders can be intercepted before doing harm.

"A helmet-wearing ski instructor colleague of mine suffered a subdural hematoma last season, when he did a 'header' in soft snow at a Utah ski area, and though he seemed only dazed, nearly died later that day," White said.

The story of White's friend began with a pair of falls on blue slopes, at typical speeds. After the first one, the man did not know he had suffered a brain bleed from a subdural hematoma and decided to go out again with friends and family another day.

On his way down a blue slope he was going a typical speed of about 14 miles per hour when he hit a rock in the steep snow and did a 360 flip, with his head hitting the packed snow as he somersaulted.

He landed on his feet and kept on skiing. Amazingly, after the ski accident, White's friend drove himself home. In the end it took a trip to the emergency room after symptoms began to show up – for a time he could not move his arms or legs and could not talk. He later said, "They did a CT scan and saw the blood on my brain." Later, he told his friend, White, "when something like this happens your ski buddies must intervene and should do three things immediately."

- Call the ski patrol and have them take the person down to the clinic;
- You stay with them and take them there;
- Do not take 'no' for an answer.

After treatment and surgery, this person was one of the lucky ones who got treatment in time and is slowly regaining his mental and physical abilities. "It was very scary," he says.

All in all, not a stellar skiing vacation.

### **Symptoms of a subdural hematoma:**

Acute subdural hematomas usually cause symptoms right away.

"However," states *Health line*, "people with chronic subdural hematomas may have no symptoms at all." Common symptoms of a subdural hematoma can include:

- slurred speech
  - loss of consciousness (temporary at times) or coma
  - Slurred speech, seizures, numbness, severe headache, and/or visual impairment.
- Obviously, anyone who has had a fall with some of these types of symptoms should go to a doctor or emergency room as soon as possible.

In a ski setting immediately call the ski patrol and take the toboggan ride to the on-slope medical center.

Subdural hematomas can be diagnosed using imaging tests, such as a CT or MRI scans.