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How to Survive an Avalanche

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You're enjoying the pristine mountain air and fresh powdered snow when suddenly, the ground rips out from under you. If you're in avalanche country, you'd better know how to act, and fast, or you could get buried under several tons of snow in under a minute. There are many steps you can take to keep from triggering an avalanche, but if you get caught in a dangerous situation anyway, here's what to do.

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- 1 Jump up the slope.** Most avalanche victims trigger the avalanche themselves, and sometimes the avalanche will start right beneath their feet. If this happens, try to jump up the slope, beyond the fracture line. An avalanche happens so quickly that it's almost impossible to react fast enough to do this, but it has been done.



2 Move to the side of the avalanche. Whether the avalanche starts above you or beneath you, you may be able to make your way toward the side. Don't hesitate: move as quickly as possible to the side of the avalanche slope. If the avalanche begins well above you, you may be able to get out of its path before it reaches you. The snow will be moving fastest near the center of the flow, and that's also where the highest volume of snow will be.



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3 **Let go of your heavy equipment.** You want your body to be as lightweight as possible, so let go of your gear, but keep your backpack, it may protect your neck and back. This raises the chances that you'll be able to stay toward the surface of the snow.

- It goes without saying that you should not let go of survival equipment, such as a transceiver and probe or snow shovel; you'll need these if you get buried.
- People searching for you later may be able to find you if they see some pieces of equipment on the surface of the snow, so you could let go of a glove or something else that's light to increase the chances they'll find you.



4 Hold on to something. If you're unable to escape the avalanche, try to grab on to a boulder or sturdy tree. If it's a small avalanche, or if you're near the edge of the avalanche, you may be able to hold on until the flow of snow passes you. Even if you get ripped away from the object you're holding, if you can succeed in delaying your departure downhill, you have a better chance of not being buried or, at least, of not being buried as deeply.

- Keep in mind that a very powerful avalanche can carry away even large rocks and trees.



5 Start swimming. This is essential to helping you stay near the surface of the snow. The human body is much denser than snow, so you'll tend to sink as you get carried downhill. Try to stay afloat by kicking your feet and thrashing your arms in a swimming motion.

- Swim on your back. This way your face is turned toward the surface, giving you a better chance of getting oxygen more quickly if you get buried.
- Swim uphill. Swimming up will get you closer to the surface of the snow.