SKATING TIPS FOR BEGINNERS

Have you always wanted to glide gracefully over the ice without falling on your rear end, but find yourself doing a split every time you try to skate? Group Learn To Skate classes or private lessons certainly will help you master the basics and progress to more advanced skills. But you can also get started on your own, if you know a few fundamental facts about skating and follow the tips below.

Getting Ready: Skates and Clothing

✓ **Good skates** with proper support, especially around the ankle area, will greatly improve your skating experience and efforts to learn. Rental skates are a good option to start; ask Stamford Twin Rink’s staff to help you secure them snugly.

✓ If you plan to skate frequently, visit a professional skate shop, such as RedLine at the STR, for advice on purchasing skates that will be comfortable and last a while. Beginners should start in figure skates, not hockey skates; figure skates have toe picks that help you to push and maintain your balance initially. If you already own skates, be sure that they fit snugly (your foot should not move around in the boot) and that the blades are sharp. (RedLine sells quality skates at a range of prices to fit almost any budget. They also sharpen skates while you wait.)

✓ **Dress warmly** (layers are good) in clothing that lets you move freely. Pants should not fall below the heel of your skate. A thin or medium weight high sock, or tights, ensures a snug-fitting skate. Wear gloves or mittens for warmth and safety.

✓ **Do wear** a helmet or thick fleece or wool hat, to protect and cushion the head in case of a fall. Wrist, elbow, and knee pads are optional; as are “crash pad pants” that protect the hips and spine (snowboarders wear them).

✓ **Skate with a friend!** Facing the challenge together will help you both relax and enjoy the experience. But *don’t* hang onto each other if you lose your balance. If you are going to fall, fall alone, so you don’t take the other person down with you!

Getting Started: Keeping Your Balance

✓ Before you step on the ice, practice walking off the ice with your skates on, taking small marching steps.

✓ If you are cautious or have never skated before, step on the ice and proceed with small marching steps as you try to get your balance. Don’t try to push right away.

✓ **Bend your knees** – a lower center-of-gravity helps you keep your balance! Keep your weight in the middle to back of your foot when skating forward; keep your weight in the ball of your foot when skating backwards.
Good posture will also help you keep your balance. When you bend your knees, you should not be able to see your toes. Keep your shoulders in line over your hips or slightly forward, and keep your feet directly under you. Try not to lean backwards.

Keep your arms out to the side or in front of you, to help maintain balance; try not to swing your arms or shoulders as you move forward. Keep your chin up and look straight ahead; looking down will pull your weight forward.

Preventing a fall: If you feel like you are losing your balance, stop moving your feet, bend your knees (like you are sitting in a chair), and place your hands on your knees. This maneuver will steady you most of the time.

Don't be afraid to fall. (Even the best skaters do!) If you can’t regain your balance, try to bend your knees and slide your body onto the ice toward one side, on your hip. To get up, start on your hands and knees (puppy style); put one foot on the ice and use your hands (placed either on the ice, or one hand on your knee and the other on the ice) to push yourself up until you can bring your second foot flat on the ice underneath you, with both knees still bent. Once you have your balance, straighten your knees slowly and stand up.

Moving Along: Pushing, Gliding, and Stopping

Once you feel steady taking basic steps, you can start pushing to propel yourself forward and pick up speed. Start with your feet together, knees bent. Lean on the foot you will glide on, and turn your pushing foot (start with your strong leg – the one you use to kick a ball) outward in a “V” (45 degree angle). Press the pushing blade against the ice – out, back, and off the ice -- while moving your weight over your standing leg as you glide forward. Try not to straighten up completely on your standing leg. Then bring the pushing leg back under you, next to your standing leg. Bend your knees again, lean your weight onto the other leg, and repeat the process with the other leg. Be sure to alternate feet when you push; don’t favor one side.

Having trouble keeping your balance on one leg? Start with a more basic forward swizzle. Start with your feet in the shape of a “V,” with heels almost touching and toes pointed out, knees bent. Press your feet into the ice as you slide toes outward into a larger “V” (about shoulder width). Then turn your toes inward and continue to press your feet into the ice as you straighten your knees and pull your feet back together. (Your feet will have made a diamond or football shape.) Turn your toes outward again and repeat. Tip: Having trouble pulling your feet back together? Squeeze the “glute” muscles, located in your rear end, as you straighten your knees.

Want to try going backwards? Keep your weight in the balls of your feet (but don’t lean forward) and try twisting your feet and hips (but not your arms) from side to side, in a wiggle motion. Once you master that, you can try backward swizzles by reversing the process described above (e.g. start with an inverted “V,” heels out and toes inward).
**Stopping:** Unlike roller skates, the toe picks on your blades are not used for stopping. Instead, try a basic Snowplow Stop (similar to skiing). Glide on both feet, about hip width apart, knees bent, toes turned slightly inward. Lean into your stronger foot and press your full blade outward and slightly forward, making a skid on the ice. **Tip:** Try the skid motion standing still first, to get the feel of it. Then practice a moving stop from a very slow speed until you are comfortable with it.

**Fun for a Lifetime!**

- **Practice makes perfect!** Like other sports and skills, the more you skate, the easier it becomes, the more confidence you have, and the more progress you make. Build weekly skating into your schedule at one of STR’s daily public skating sessions. **Bonus:** Ice skating is a good cardio fitness activity; it also helps strengthen and tone muscles through movement and balance.

- Your skates will last longer with proper care. Always dry blades thoroughly after each session, using a clean, soft towel (an old dish towel is perfect), to avoid rusting. Do **not** put rubber guards on your blades after drying, as they trap moisture.

- Ideally, your blades should only touch the ice surface; use rubber guards to walk around off-ice areas. Skaters using rental skates should only walk on surfaces with rubber mats; walking on cement, wood, or metal will scratch the blades.

- Don’t be discouraged! Learning to skate takes time and consistent practice. But by following our tips, you can master the basics and enjoy skating as a recreational and fitness activity for many, many years to come. (There are skaters well into their 70s, and older, practicing at STR!)

- **Visit our web site, www.stamfordtwinrinks.com, for information about group lessons for adults and children, offered throughout the year!**