

Women in Adventure Sports

Charlotte Flood
Page Editor

In the last two decades women have been building their place in adventure sports, despite pushback from society claiming that they're "physically unsuited" for this type of activity. In the 19th and early 20th century many medical professionals, such as gynecology experts and societal tradition-bearers, argued that intense, active, or dangerous sports could lead to medical complications.

This includes uterine displacement, dangerous energy depletion, or even infertility. This way of thinking was often driven by the idea that a woman's body was solely meant for reproductive purposes, and therefore was too fragile to handle this amount of physical activity.

However, over the years this has been disproven medically, psychologically, and physically. The world has watched as women decided to break down these barriers and

conquer what society deemed impossible. Now women make up over 40% of participants in many adventure sports, including trail running, climbing, and obstacle racing.

A government definition for adventure sports, given by Press Information Bureau, India, states that, "Adventure sports or extreme sports are activities undertaken through the medium of land, water, and air and perceived as involving a high degree of risk.

These activities often involve speed, height, a high level of physical exertion and highly specialized gear." Some activities that fit this definition include skateboarding, mountain biking, parkour, surfing, kayaking, snowboarding, skiing, sky diving, and more. When it comes to these sports, women seem to especially thrive in those that require endurance, adaptability, and judgment based events where success is defined

not by brute force, but by resilience over time. This is due to a multitude of scientific factors that decreased credibility of early medical professionals.

Professional women in the late 19th century were the first to disprove these claims that included no scientific support.

Dr. Mary Putnam Jacobi, a pioneering 19th century American physician, scientist, and suffragist, used extensive clinical data and psychological evidence to prove that physical activity did not harm reproductive health. This research directly refuted Dr. Edward Clark's "limited energy" theories, which stated that energy diverted to one part of the body was necessarily stolen from another.



ALPINE SKIING Lindsey Vonn for the 2026 Winter Olympics.

Photo via the Olympics.

These theories were often used when arguing for girls to not participate in rigorous physical or mental labor, as it would disrupt the development of vital reproductive organs and the menstruation cycle.

Not only have these studies been disproven but we have also discovered that women have some advantages over men when it comes to intense activity. While men have 20% larger muscle mass and a larger chest cavity, allowing them to take in more oxygen, women have been found to excel in mental strength.

Women have been shown to demonstrate greater fatigue resistance and psychological resilience. They excel in risk assessment, adaptability, and emotional regulation, giving them an edge in these often dangerous and fatiguing sports.

Kathrine Switzer became the first woman to officially enter the Boston Marathon in 1967—only 60

years ago. Despite the race attempting to physically remove her, she finished the race, five years before women were allowed to even compete, in 1972.

Kathrine and many more women have had a significant impact in breaking down gender based barriers in sports, showing other women that they are just as able as men. Less than a generation ago, women were being told that endurance and risk didn't belong to them—today, they are redefining what adventure looks like.

With more and more women being represented in adventure sports, the world is being forced to change, as women stop asking to be seen and instead force people to open their eyes.



AMERICAN PRIDE Snowboarder Chloe Kim poses with the American flag at the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. Photo via Team USA.