

## Hockey Skate Sharpening Guide

Sharpening your ice skates is an important part of skating well, whether you've just bought new hockey skates or you've been skating for a while on the skates you currently own. Maintaining a sharp skate blade will determine a great deal about how well you'll be able to turn and stop, as well as the speed and control you'll be able to achieve.

### How Do I Know When to Sharpen My Hockey Skates?

There are a variety of ways to know when it's time to sharpen your skates. Dull blades will chatter, pull to one side, wobble out of control, or prevent you from turning as tight as you normally do.

- If you find yourself struggling with quick turns or the blades don't bite into the ice as they should, you might need to get your skates sharpened.
- Carefully run your finger down the length of the blade, feeling for nicks or gouges. A light touch is all that is needed to detect defects. Also, the blade should feel sharp.
- Look at your blade under a bright light. If you see a reflection in the blade's edge, you need to sharpen your skates.

Try to adhere to a schedule for sharpening your hockey skate blades. Sharpen them too often and your blades will wear out prematurely. Not frequently enough, and you'll find yourself losing an edge when trying to turn, or unable to control your skates.

### What's the Blade Hollow?

When skates are sharpened, a hollow groove is cut into the center of the bottom of the blade. It is cut deep enough that what is left are the two edges on each side. The hollow is between these two edges and extends up into the blade. The depth of the hollow will affect the performance of the skate. A deeper hollow will slow the skate yet give the skater more control. A shallower hollow will increase a skater's speed, but may require more skating skill. Generally, hockey skates will have a hollow between three-eighths and five-eighths of an inch. Experienced skaters will often use a hollow that they have played on for years and have become accustomed to, while beginners will often use a half-inch hollow.

### How Do I Sharpen My Skate Blades?

If you don't know what you're doing, it's best to have your hockey skate blades sharpened for you. While there are tools you can throw in your hockey bag to sharpen your skates, they're best used for a touchup before a game or to smooth a nick during a game. Some tools will wear away more of your blade, which means your skates will need new blades sooner. It's best to take your skates to a trained skate sharpener who uses quality equipment.

Generally a machine will make multiple passes on your blades. The first few passes are typically done on the cross-grind machine to remove major impediments like rust, nicks, and dings. After all impediments are removed the skate is moved to the sharpening stone that will apply your desired hollow. The last few passes create the finer edge. A finishing stone will deburr the blade, removing any imperfections left after the sharpening process. There are a wide variety of methods and machines to sharpen skates. You may be limited to what is available, but if you have options, ask experienced players where they take their skates and why they take them there. A cross grind is used to fix poor work, such as when another skate shop doesn't perfectly center the hollow—in that case there is little recourse but to grind off the edges and redo them.

### How Often Should I Sharpen My Hockey Skates?

It depends a lot on how often you skate. If you skate every day you'll find your skates need to be sharpened more often than someone who is on the ice only once a week for an hour. Some players sharpen their skates before every game and others may drop their skates for a sharpening only once or twice per month. If you practice three times per week in addition to games, you may want to try a weekly sharpening schedule. Adjust based on your skating schedule, ice factors, and what works for you.

Other factors can affect how often your skates need to be sharpened as well:

- The temperature of the ice will affect your skate blade wear. Colder ice is harder and will wear your edges faster.
- Indoor or outdoor? Outdoor ice will often be colder and harder, thereby wearing your edges faster. But there is also debris on outdoor ice. From small stones to dirt, sticks, leaves, and more, your skates will take more of a beating on outdoor ice and need more frequent touch-ups.
- The quality of your steel. Higher end skates will usually include higher quality blades. Better blades hold an edge longer and require fewer sharpenings, whereas lesser quality blades simply don't hold an edge as well.

Be cognizant as to how often you sharpen your blades as sharpening your skates more frequently than necessary will potentially wear your blades quicker than necessary. Stainless steel blades should stand up to about 100 to 150 sharpenings, meaning only the most hardcore hockey players will wear out blades from sharpening. But remember, some machines—and in particular an inexperienced sharpener—could wear down your blades much more quickly and shorten their lives much faster.

Sharpening your skates is part of owning them. It's complicated, but in the hands of a skilled pro, is nothing more than part of the game.

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