

Safe Snow Shoveling

“God’s voice thunders in marvelous ways; he does great things beyond our understanding. He says to the snow, ‘Fall on the earth,’ ... So that all men he has made may know his work...” Job 37:5-7

It is a fact of life in cold climates—snow falls and it must be cleared. Shoveling snow can be good exercise when done correctly, but safety must always be the first consideration. The greatest dangers are a heart attack or back injury. Both are serious and can have life long consequences. The upside of snow shoveling is that it is classified as moderate physical activity—something we all need to experience for 30 minutes each day. Other examples of moderate physical activity include brisk walking and social dancing.

Shoveling snow is much like lifting weights, and the cold air adds an extra strain on the body. Those people at the greatest risk for a back injury or a heart attack include people who:

- Have a history of heart attack or heart disease
- Have high blood pressure or high cholesterol
- Smoke
- Have inactive lifestyles
- Currently have a “bad back”

Anyone in these categories may want to hire the work done, or at the very least proceed very cautiously.

There are many ways to ensure that snow removal is good, safe exercise with just a few precautions and a little preparation. Warm your muscles up first, since warm muscles are less likely to be strained. It would be wise to march in place (or to the mailbox), roll your shoulders, swing your arms, and flex your knees before picking up a snow shovel. Dress in layers and wear slip resistant boots. Use a shovel with a S-shaped handle--it is designed to reduce strain on the spine. Consider using a snow blower to reduce the exertion required to clear the driveway or sidewalk. Try to shovel when the snow is still light and powdery whenever possible.

Hold the shovel close to the body and push the snow instead of lifting it, if at all possible. When you must lift, bend your knees and use your legs to lift while keeping your back straight. Avoid throwing the snow; instead carry it to the pile. A good strategy for deep snow is to shovel the top couple inches, take a break, and then tackle the next two inches. Consider using a smaller shovel, which forces you to scoop lighter loads. When buying a shovel, remember that a plastic shovel will be lighter than a metal one. Drink a glass of water before you start, and during your breaks—dehydration is an issue in the winter months, too. When you grip the shovel, make sure your hands are at least 12 inches apart, with one hand close to the base of the shovel. Consider spraying the shovel with a lubricant or silicon spray so the snow slides off easily.

STOP anytime you feel any pain, anywhere. If you are overheated, short of breath, or are sweating heavily, it's time to rest. If you cannot say a long sentence in one breath, you need to stop what you are doing until you recover. Most importantly, **listen** to your body. This is one instance when "toughing it out" may cause a serious injury, or even death. So be sensible, and be safe, and what the heck, make a snow angel!

For more information:

www.homemadesimple.com (select your language preference, then search snow shoveling)

www.healthcentral.com (search snow shoveling)