

Snow Shoveling Safety Tips

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We've had our first accumulation of snow and many people need to clear driveways and walkways. The combination of heavy lifting, cold weather and vigorous physical work can result injuries to the back and shoulder muscles if you do not take the proper precautions. The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS) makes several recommendations to help you stay safe while clearing snow so you can still have some winter fun. AAOS offers the following tips to prevent injuries while shoveling:

- **Check with your doctor.** Because this activity places high stress on the heart, speak with your physician first. If you have a medical condition or do not exercise regularly, consider asking someone else to remove the snow.
- **Dress appropriately.** Light, layered, water-repellent clothing provides both ventilation and insulation. It is also important to wear the appropriate head coverings, as well as mittens or gloves and thick, warm socks. Take a break if you feel yourself getting too hot or too cold.
- **See what you are shoveling.** Watch for ice patches and uneven surfaces. Avoid falls by wearing shoes or boots that have slip-resistant soles.
- **Clear snow early and often.** Begin when a light covering of snow is on the ground to avoid trying to clear packed, heavy snow.

When shoveling:

- **Warm up your muscles.** Shoveling can be a vigorous activity. Before you begin, warm up your muscles for 10 minutes with light physical work.
- **Pace yourself.** Take frequent breaks and replenish fluids to prevent dehydration. If you experience chest pain, shortness of breath or other signs of a heart attack, seek emergency care.
- **Use a shovel that is comfortable for your height and strength.** Do not use a shovel that is too heavy or too long for you. Consider buying a shovel that is specially designed to prevent too much stooping. Space your hands on the tool grip to increase your leverage.
- **When possible, push the snow instead of lifting it.** If you must lift, take small amounts of snow, and lift it with your legs: Squat with your legs apart, knees bent and back straight. Lift by straightening your legs, without bending at the waist. Then walk to where you want to dump the snow; keep the shovel close to you to reduce stress on the spine.
- **Do not throw the snow over your shoulder or to the side.** This requires a twisting motion that stresses your back.