



Snow Shoveling Safety

Shoveling snow is very hard work. It can cause muscle strains and back injuries, especially if you do not lift properly. It can also put severe stress on your heart and can even result in heart attack. Shoveling snow, especially if the snow is wet, is like picking up heavy weights. One shovel load can weigh an excess of 25 pounds.

Snow blowers are preferred, but not always available and there are inherent dangers associated with any mechanical equipment. If you or your employees must use a shovel to remove snow, please use information in this bulletin as a reminder to take care when shoveling.

Be heart healthy and avoid back injuries this winter by following these shoveling safety tips

- Before you start shoveling, move and stretch your muscles to warm them up.
- Layer your clothing to keep muscles warm and flexible
- Avoid caffeine and nicotine before beginning to shovel. These are stimulants, which may increase your heart rate and cause your blood vessels to constrict. This places extra stress on the heart.
- Use a shovel with a handle that is long enough to let you keep your back straight when lifting. An ergonomic shovel with a bend handle is better than one with a straight handle.
- Take it slow. Shoveling can raise your heart rate and blood pressure dramatically.
- Drink plenty of water. Dehydration is as big an issue in the winter as it is in the summer.
- Push the snow whenever possible rather than lifting it.
- Lift with your legs bent and your back as straight as possible, so you are lifting with your legs rather than your back.
- When possible try to maintain the natural “S” curve in your back, it is strongest in this position.
- Step in the direction you are throwing the snow. This will help you to avoid twisting your lower back.
- Do not toss snow over your shoulder or to the side.
- Take frequent breaks. During breaks stand straight and walk around. Stretch your back by placing your hands on your hips and bend backward slightly for several seconds.
- Most importantly – listen to your body. Don’t shovel to the point of exhaustion. If you are out of breath, take a break. If your muscles tighten, take a break. If you feel tightness in your chest, stop immediately.

