



HEALTHY LIVING



Snow Shoveling Safety

When snow, ice and frigid weather blast into town, it's important to take the necessary precautions to prevent injury. Winter recreational activities and chores such as snow shoveling can pose problems for the outdoor enthusiast whose body is unconditioned. Shoveling snow the wrong way, slipping on sidewalks and wearing the wrong kinds of clothing can lead to spasms, strains and sprains.

Simply walking outside in the freezing weather without layers of warm clothing can intensify older joint problems and cause pain. As muscles and blood vessels contract to conserve the body's heat, the blood supply to extremities is reduced. This lowers the functional capacity of many muscles, particularly among the physically unfit. Preparation for an outdoor winter activity, including conditioning the areas of the body that are most vulnerable, can help you avoid injury and costly healthcare bills.

Shoveling snow without proper preparation can wreak havoc on the musculoskeletal system. Consider the following tips to help prevent injury:

- Layer clothing to keep your muscles warm and flexible. Shoveling can strain “deconditioned” muscles between your shoulders and in your upper back, lower back, buttocks and legs. Do some warm-up stretching before you grab the shovel.
- When you do shovel, push the snow straight ahead. Walk it to the snowbank—don't try to throw it. Avoid sudden twisting and turning motions.
- Bend your knees to lift when shoveling. Let the muscles of your legs and arms take some of the strain of shoveling off your back.
- Take frequent rest breaks to take the strain off your muscles. A fatigued body asks for injury.
- Stop shoveling if you experience chest pain, shortness of breath, or get very tired. You may need emergency medical assistance.

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