



BACK FACTS: Snow Shoveling

Snow-shoveling injuries are the leading cause of back and neck pain during the winter months. Such injuries are often the result of poor shoveling techniques.

Improper technique can be anything from bending at the waist instead of at the knees, to throwing snow rather than pushing it. Improper technique combined with the average weight of one shovelful of snow (three to five kilograms) can result in serious aches and pain. Here are some tips on how to lift light and shovel right.



Before You Start

- Talk to your healthcare provider about your health status before shoveling, particularly if you have had a heart attack or any other forms of heart disease, have high blood pressure or high cholesterol levels, if you are a smoker or if you lead a sedentary lifestyle.
- Try to avoid caffeine and nicotine. These are stimulants which may increase your heart rate and in turn place extra stress on the heart.
- Drink plenty of water. Dehydration is just as big an issue in cold winter months as it is in the summer.
- Dress in several layers so you can remove a layer as you get warm.
- Wear proper footwear. Shoes and boots with solid treads on the soles can help to minimize the risk of slips and falls.
- Pick the right shovel. Use a lightweight, non-stick, push-style shovel. A smaller blade will require you to lift less snow, putting less strain on your body. An ergonomically correct model (curved handle) will help prevent injury and fatigue. Also, if you spray the blade with a silicone-based lubricant, the snow will not stick to the shovel and will slide off more easily.
- Don't let the snow pile up. Removing small amounts of snow on a frequent basis is less strenuous in the long run.

All Set to Go

Warm-up. Before beginning any snow removal, warm-up for five to ten minutes to get the joints moving and increase blood circulation. To do this, march on the spot, climb the stairs, or go for a quick walk around the block. Follow this with some gentle stretches for the back (knee to chest), arms and shoulders (body hug), and legs (forward bends from a seated position). This will ensure that your body is ready for action.

Push, don't throw. Push the snow to one side and avoid throwing it. If you must throw it, avoid twisting and turning – position yourself to throw straight at the snow pile.

Bend your knees. Use your knees, leg and arm muscles to do the pushing and lifting while keeping your back straight.

Watch the ice. Be careful on icy walkways and slippery surfaces. Intermittent thaws and subsequent freezing can lead to ice building up underfoot, resulting in nasty slips and falls. These types of mishaps can cause serious strained, bruised or torn muscles, and in some cases, broken bones. Coarse sand, ice salt, ice melter, or even kitty litter can help give sidewalks and driveways more traction, reducing the chance of a slip or fall.

Take a break. If you feel tired or short of breath, stop and take a rest. Make it a habit to rest for a moment or two for every 10 or 15 minutes of shoveling. This is especially important if the snow is wet and heavy. Stop shoveling immediately if you feel chest or back pain, feel dizzy, are short of breath or if your heartbeat is rapid

Canada's chiropractors – here to help

Chiropractors can help prevent backpack problems by teaching you how to spare your back when shoveling. Should you suffer an injury from shoveling, a chiropractor can also provide relief for your pain.

Fact: 80 per cent of Canadians will suffer from back pain in their lifetime. If required, a chiropractor can treat your pain through a variety of methods. These can include: spine and joint adjustment, modalities such as ultrasound or TENS, soft tissue therapy and therapeutic exercises.

For more information or to locate a chiropractor near you, please visit the Canadian Chiropractic Association website www.chiropracticcanada.ca.

Lift light. Shovel right.



The Canadian Chiropractic Association

www.chiropracticcanada.ca