

Shoveling Snow

In addition to other safety considerations in the winter months, shoveling snow poses risks. Injuries from slips, sun exposure and working around moving vehicles are all possible, in addition to muscle strains, frostbite and heart attacks. Whether on the job or at home, if you have to clear snow, the following tips may prevent injuries.

Know your limitations

- **Do not overexert yourself.** Your body is working hard to stay warm, so be careful not to work too hard. Some people are more at risk: smokers, those with a history of heart disease or high blood pressure and those that lead an inactive lifestyle. Check with your doctor if you have any concerns.
- **Look into alternatives.** Snow shoveling can be good exercise, but if you have been inactive or have certain risk factors, consider alternatives to shoveling like using a snow blower or hiring services that are equipped to do this.
- **Use proper lifting techniques.** Use your legs, not your back. Keep the shovel close to your body, and avoid any twisting motion.
- **Handle only what you can lift.** Snow can be heavy! It can sometimes weigh as much as 15 pounds per cubic foot. Only handle an amount of snow within your capabilities. Use a small shovel to avoid lifting large amounts at one time.
- **Take frequent breaks.** Take a break every five or 10 minutes while you're working. Never let your heart rate exceed 85 percent of its maximum. Monitor your heart rate and pace yourself. To estimate your maximum heart rate, subtract your age from 220.
- **Don't ignore chest pain or tightness.** If this kind of ache occurs, assume the worst and call 911.

Before you begin

- **Drink water.** Typically, people shovel snow in the morning when they're dehydrated. Dehydration is a stress to the heart. Drink a couple glasses of water about thirty minutes before you start. Stay hydrated throughout all work periods.
- **Avoid caffeine and smoking.** Caffeine and nicotine are stimulants which could increase your heart rate and place more stress on your heart.
- **Warm up.** Snow shoveling is vigorous exercise. Walk for a short period of time to warm up. Stretch the muscles in your back, legs, shoulders and arms prior to starting. Warm muscles work more efficiently and are less prone to injury.
- **Dress in layers.** Putting on a heavy coat is often done prior to starting this task. This is potentially dangerous because you may quickly overheat, which can put additional strain on your heart. Wear a shirt under a sweater, under a light jacket, and strip off layers as your body warms.
- **Slip protection.** Wear anti-slip and supportive shoes, or wear shoe grips attached to the base of the shoes to prevent slips. Be aware of icy areas that may be hidden below the snow layer.
- **Cover your face and hands in extreme cold.** Frostbite can occur easily in sub-zero temperatures, particularly to the extremities.
 - Ensure your fingertips are fully covered with gloves.
 - Wear layered socks under your boots.
 - Cover your nose and ears.
 - Use sunscreen if the sun is out. Increased reflective exposure from the snow can result in sunburn very quickly.
 - Be aware of wind chill. Wind can carry heat away from your body more quickly and cause skin temperatures to drop.

Information provided by Succeed Management Systems