



Peak Physical Therapy and Wellness News . . .

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5 Tips for Safe Snow Shoveling This Winter!

There's nothing quite like winter in New England with its bone-chilling cold, snow banks as high as the sky, and endless snow shoveling. With all that shoveling, it's no wonder the number of lower back injuries escalates this time of year. While snow removal may be unavoidable, being injured by it doesn't have to be. Here are five simple tips to keep you safe while getting the job done this winter.

1. Choose the right equipment

The importance of having an ergonomic shovel that is comfortable for your height cannot be overstated. Choosing a shovel with a lightweight, plastic blade with a handle of appropriate length is very important. Using a shovel that is too heavy and long for your size will increase the strain on your lumbar spine, putting you at risk for a lower back injury.

2. Warm up!

Shoveling heavy snow is strenuous exercise and involves the use of several muscle groups in the arms, legs, and trunk. When muscles are cold and tight, they are more susceptible to injury, so heading out into cold temperatures without a proper warm-up is not advisable. The simplest way to prepare for shoveling is to take a ten minute walk. This will help to increase the blood flow to those important muscle groups and reduce the risk of injury. Performing gentle stretching for the lower extremities and lower back will also help prepare you for activity.

3. Use proper lifting technique

If at all possible, push the snow rather than lift it, as this will be the least stressful method of removing snow. In all likelihood, however, it will be necessary to do some lifting and doing it properly is essential to avoiding a back injury. When lifting snow, be sure to squat with the knees bent and back straight. Avoid bending at the waist and be conscious of your form throughout the activity. Many people start out with proper lifting technique but begin to lose it once becoming fatigued. Pace yourself, focusing on proper body mechanics, rather than trying to get the job done quickly.

4. Better to be safe than speedy

When shoveling snow, it is not advantageous to try and accomplish the task as swiftly as possible. As previously mentioned, you will likely lose your form and try to lift too much too quickly. Rather than try to remove large amounts of heavy snow at once, keep loads light by

only lifting small amounts at a time. Also, place your arms with one hand near the shovel blade and the other on the handle. This will increase your leverage. Keep heavy loads close to your body to avoid lower back strain and never twist or throw snow over your shoulder. Instead, carry light loads of snow to wherever you are placing it. Again, shoveling is a marathon, not a sprint. It is important to pace yourself, take breaks, and keep hydrated. If you experience chest pain or shortness of breath, seek medical help immediately. Shoveling increases stress on the cardiovascular system as well, so someone with a known heart condition should avoid shoveling altogether.

5. Dress appropriately

The right clothing will provide both warmth and ventilation. This is best achieved by wearing light layers. This will also help keep the muscles warm, which is essential to preventing injury. A water-proof jacket is an appropriate top layer to assure you stay dry.

Complete the look with a warm hat, water-proof gloves, cozy socks, and snow boots. Make sure your snow boots have appropriate treads to prevent slipping. It is vital to have a stable base when lifting snow, thus proper footwear is important. Spreading rock salt as you go is beneficial for increasing traction and decreasing the likelihood of slipping on ice.

Snow in New England is nearly unavoidable, but fortunately, back injuries are. Following these steps will decrease your chances of suffering a painful injury. In addition, focus on sticking to a comprehensive core and lower extremity strengthening program so that you are always ready for the strenuous tasks winter has to bring.

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