

## Snow Shoveling Safety Tips



**Be Prepared** – Spray your shovel with Teflon so the snow won't stick to it. The more snow that stays on the shovel, the heavier it gets and the more chance for injury and frustration.

**Do a Warm-Up first** – A tight stiff body is asking for injury. A few minutes of stretching can save you a lot of pain later. (And when you are shoveling, don't forget to breathe. Holding your breath makes you tight and stiff.)

**Layer Your Clothing** – Layered clothing will keep your muscles warm and flexible. You can shed a layer if you get too hot. Make sure you wear gloves that cover your wrists completely; if your wrists get cold, then your fingers, hands, and arms will be cold too.



**Wear the Right Shoes** – Choose shoes with plenty of cushioning in the soles to absorb the impact of walking on hard, frozen ground.

**Use the Right Size Shovel** – Your shovel should be about chest high on you, allowing you to keep your back straight when lifting. A shovel with a short staff forces you to bend more to lift the load; a too-tall shovel makes the weight heavier at the end. (Note: Save your money – don't buy a fancy ergonomic shovel; studies have shown that in some models, the hook end is too deep. Twisting to unload a shovelful of snow with this tool may hurt your wrists.) Also keep one hand close to the base of the shovel to balance weight and lessen the strain on your back.

**Timing is Everything** – Listen to weather forecasts so you can shovel in ideal conditions. If possible, wait until the afternoon to shovel. Many spinal disc injuries occur in the morning when there is increased fluid pressure in the discs because your body had been at rest all night.

**Drink Lots of Water** – Drinking water frequently throughout the day helps to keep muscles and the body hydrated. Be careful with hot drinks like coffee or hot chocolate. Coffee contains caffeine, which has a dehydrating effect and adds even more stress to the body.



**Use Proper Posture** – When you do shovel, bend your knees and keep your back straight while lifting with your legs. Push the snow straight while lifting with your legs. Push the snow straight ahead. Don't try to throw it. Walk it to the snow bank. Try to shovel forward to avoid sudden twists of the torso and reduce strain on the back. The American Chiropractic Association recommends using the "scissor stance," in which you work with your right foot forward for a few minutes and then shift the other foot to the front.

**Take Your Time** – Working too hard, too fast is an easy way to strain muscles. Take frequent breaks. Shovel for about 5 minutes and then rest for 2 minutes or so.

**See Your Chiropractor** – Gentle spinal adjustments will help keep your back flexible and minimize the chance for injury. If you do overdo it, your chiropractor can help you feel better and prevent further injury.