

Snow Shoveling, Blowing Can Bring Aches & Pains

From: Orthopaedic Specialty Group, PC

Snow shoveling can be a pain in the neck, as well as a pain in the shoulder, wrist, knees and back. While shoveling, the twisting, reaching, bending, and lifting can cause a new or re-occurring injury to a person's joints. But with a little planning and preparation, aches and pains can be minimized.

Injuries from shoveling occur from the overextension of muscles and poor body mechanics. Common injuries include a back or wrist strain, pulled muscle, a stress fracture, or even a rotator cuff tear from a fall on the ice. These can cause chronic pain, downtime at work and home, and hefty medical expenses.

Snow blowing can also be hazardous. Remember: Never stick your hands in the snow blower. If snow jams the snow blower, stop the engine and wait more than five seconds. Use a solid object to clear wet snow or debris from the chute. Beware of the recoil of the motor and blades after the machine has been turned off.

Here are other tips to help you avoid injury this winter:

- **Check with your doctor.** If you have a medical condition or are concerned about your health, talk with your doctor before shoveling.
- **Stretch.** Warm up your muscles for 10 minutes with stretching and light exercise. While shoveling, take frequent breaks and stretch your back by leaning backward.
- **Pace yourself.** Snow shoveling is an aerobic activity. Take breaks and replenish fluids to prevent dehydration. If you experience chest pain, shortness of breath or have any pain, stop right away and call your doctor or seek emergency care by calling 911.
- **Lift with your legs.** Lifting a shovelful of snow should be done with your legs, not your back. Keep your back straight, bend your knees, and lift the snow by straightening your knees.
- **Lift smaller loads.** Avoid scooping and throwing heavy loads of snow.
- **Avoid twisting.** Turn your entire body and step in the direction in which you are throwing the snow. Do not just twist at the waist and throw. Twisting and throwing a heavy load will cause early back fatigue and make the back susceptible to severe injuries.
- **Use a good shovel.** Invest in a light, plastic shovel, and one that is the right length for you. Shovels with a built-in curve are less strenuous on your back than the straight, broomstick style.
- **Scoop uphill.** If your driveway or sidewalk is sloped, start at the bottom and shovel uphill to avoid bending as much.
- **Spread hands apart.** Keep your hands apart for greater leverage while lifting and throwing snow.
- **Lubricate your shovel.** Spray the bucket with light cooking oil, such as Pam cooking spray, to help snow slide off easier.
- **Watch for ice.** As you shovel watch for ice under snow that can cause you to slip and fall.

- **Shovel right away.** Shovel as soon as possible after the snow has fallen. Newly-fallen snow is lighter than heavily-packed or partially-melted snow.
- **Take your time.** For deep snow, shovel a layer at a time and avoid lifting too much snow at one time.
- **Wear proper attire.** Dress in layers. If you get too warm, you can always take off a layer. Choose clothing that is loose and breathable. Footwear should have soles that will grip slippery surfaces to prevent falling.

Orthopaedic Specialty Group serves patients in southern Connecticut. Clinics are located in Fairfield, Stratford, and Shelton. Areas of specialty include spine, shoulder and elbow, hand and wrist, hip and knee, sports medicine, joint reconstruction, pediatric orthopaedics, trauma, physical medicine and rehabilitation, pain management, cartilage restoration, and non-operative care options.

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