

Shovel safe this winter

Shoveling snow: for some a dreaded necessity, for others, great exercise. No matter what your perspective, shoveling snow or operating a snow blower can also cause back injury or heart strain. In fact, 11,000 people go to the hospital due to snow removal related incidents every year. Following these safety tips can save you from harm:

Shun shoveling if you have heart disease/risk: If you have a history of heart problems consult with your health care provider before shoveling. The weight of the snow and the cold temperatures places a strain on the heart and raises blood pressure.

Don't shovel right after eating or while smoking: This places extra strain on your heart.

Warm up: Move around for a few minutes before you start shoveling. Walk while gently swinging your arms and legs. This gets your muscles warm and reduces the risk of injury.

Protect your back: Here are some dos and don'ts:

- DO bend your knees, and lift using your legs.
- DON'T bend over from the back/waist.
- DO lift snow with your feet about shoulder width apart, and your knees bent.
- DON'T pick up too much snow at once.
- DO push snow instead of lifting if possible.
- DO keep your shovel close to your body.

Shovel while snow is fresh: Snow is much lighter and easier to lift right after it has fallen. Once it settles, gets wet, or is walked on, it is much harder to remove.

Pace yourself: Don't overexert. Work at a pace that feels right for you. Take plenty of breaks.

Stay warm. Wear enough and proper clothing. Go inside to warm up when you need to.

Pay attention to your body. If you feel tired, hurt, or in any way do not feel well – stop! Call 911 immediately if you experience signs of heart attack, such as

- Pressure or tightness in your chest or arms (might spread to jaws neck or back)
- Shortness of breath
- Nausea, indigestion, heartburn or abdominal pain
- Cold sweat
- Fatigue
- Lightheadedness or sudden dizziness

The same goes for snow blowers: Pushing a heavy snow blower has the same risks as shoveling. Use all the precautions listed above. In addition, follow these tips:

- Turn off your blower if it jams.
- Keep your hands away from moving parts.
- Beware of carbon monoxide risk. Don't run a snowblower in an enclosed space.
- Add fuel outside only. Add fuel before you turn on the machine – never while it is running.
- Never leave a snowblower unattended when it is running.

Learn more:

[National Safety Council](#)

[Cleveland Clinic](#)

[Mayo Clinic](#)