

Shoveling Tips



Tips for Shoveling Snow Safely

Clearing snow from driveways and walkways is an inevitable winter chore in many parts of the country. While snow removal can be aggravating, it is also physically demanding work that can lead to injury. Common shoveling-related injuries include pulled muscles and back strains. The cold air temperature makes it more difficult to breathe, creating an additional stress on the body. The good news is that with the proper preparation and a little patience, you can help avoid getting hurt while shoveling this winter.

Keep the following safety tips in mind as you get ready for the first big dig-out:

Avoid caffeinated drinks and nicotine

Do not drink caffeinated beverages or smoke before you go out to shovel. Stimulants such as these can increase your heart rate and restrict your blood vessels, which can place extra strain on your heart.

Stay hydrated

It is as important to avoid dehydration in the winter as it is in the summer. Be sure to drink plenty of water before you begin, as well as while you are shoveling.

Warm up your muscles

To stretch your arms and legs, walk in place for five to 10 minutes or do some jumping jacks before you head outside. It is also important to stretch the muscles in your back. To focus specifically on your lower back,

lie on your back and slowly bring your knees to your chest.

Choose the right shovel

Use a lightweight shovel with a smaller blade to help prevent you from lifting too much snow at one time. Consider using an ergonomically-correct shovel with a bend in the handle that is designed to keep you from stooping over and straining your back.

Dress appropriately

Wear a hat, gloves or mittens, and loose-fitting layers of clothing that are comfortable to move around in. Be sure to keep your feet warm and dry in a pair of boots that have good traction to help keep you from slipping.

Use the proper technique

Whenever possible, push snow rather than lifting it. If you must lift it, maintain good posture by standing with your feet shoulder-width apart to help keep your balance. Bend your knees—not your back—and lift the shovel with your stomach muscles and legs. Never throw snow over your shoulder.

Pay attention to your body

If you are in pain, stop shoveling and head indoors to rest. If you experience symptoms such as chest pain, dizziness, fainting, nausea, or shortness of breath, seek medical help immediately.

Although digging out from a winter storm is rarely fun, you may be able to help prevent muscle strain and serious injury, if you take some precautions. Keeping the tips here in mind can help to make shoveling a little safer.

Note: If you live a sedentary lifestyle or have a history of heart trouble, consult your doctor before taking on the task of shoveling snow.