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## Get the Scoop on Shoveling Snow Safely

Heart attacks, strain on the back, muscle spasms, and additional conditions can all be side effects of shoveling snow. A required task in many regions of the country each winter, shoveling snow could turn into a medical emergency.

Typical winter conditions, such as temperatures below 20 F, a few inches of snow and the physical activity of shoveling, can cause death rates from heart attacks to triple among men 35 to 49 years old, say medical experts. While shoveling may seem like child's play, it's really the equivalent of playing an active game of tennis or doing speed walking. That's a big demand on the body, primarily for individuals who are not accustomed to such physical exertion.

Also, people underestimate just how many pounds of snow are being moved. On average, a shovel loaded with snow can weigh approximately 15 pounds. Repeatedly removing snow over the course of even a few minutes can add up to thousands of pounds.

Shoveling snow safely requires a few precautions.

\* If you are prone to heart trouble, ask your doctor if it is safe to shovel snow. If not, hire a professional or a neighborhood kid to do the shoveling.

\* Don't smoke or drink caffeine before starting to shovel. These substances can constrict blood vessels and compound problems of blood flow to and from the heart.

\* Stretch your back, legs and arms before shoveling to reduce the chance for strain or more serious injury. Warm up muscles by walking or marching in place. Swing your arms and rotate your neck as well.

\* Choose a small-bladed shovel. This will prevent you from overloading the shovel with snow.

\* Always bend with the knees and lift with your legs. Step in the direction you'll be throwing the snow so you're not pivoting at your back and waist, potentially causing injury.

\* Do a lot of pushing of snow and a little lifting whenever possible.



**You should not bend at the waist when shoveling snow due to the heightened risk of injury.**

\* Shovel in sections, especially when there is a heavy accumulation of snow.

\* Dress in layers so you can remove them to feel comfortable. You don't want to sweat and risk hypothermia. Also, drink plenty of water to stay hydrated.

\* Pay attention to what your body is telling you. If you feel pain, shortness of breath, dizziness, or any other adverse symptoms, stop shoveling and get rest or medical attention.

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