



Shovel Responsibly

Whew! That was some windstorm that blew through town here on Sunday! It is a foreshadowing of our transition to winter that technically happens in three weeks. Rumor has it that it will be the La Nina pattern again that was blamed for all the snow of last winter. Like it or not that means some snow shovelling is in our future. I think that it is a good time to review the basics of doing it right, just in case you have forgotten.

Every year I see patients who injure themselves doing their shovelling duties. It requires proper preparation, the right tools, good technique and knowledge.

Preparation

Be sure the snow removal machine is ready. Remember your body is the machine and that the shovel is like an attachment on this machine. Take a hard look at his machine before you fire it up into a frenzy of power shovelling. Is your spine moving well, are you overweight, are your muscles strong and flexible?

Some of you are not as young as you were when I first met you! When was the last time you came to see us for a tune up?

- * Think twice if you:
 - ✧ have had a heart attack or have other forms of heart disease
 - ✧ have had a recent injury particularly of your low back
 - ✧ lead a sedentary lifestyle
- * If you live with a healthy young teenager this is a great opportunity for them to repay you for feeding and providing shelter! If not consider hiring a student or using a volunteer service if you are a senior.
- * Warm up first (walk or march in place for several minutes before beginning).
- * Start slow and continue at a pace that is appropriate for your level of fitness (Suggestion: shovel for 5-7 minutes and rest 2-3 minutes).

- * Shovel early and often, new snow is lighter than heavily packed/partially melted snow.

Tools

Shovel-



- * sturdy yet lightweight is best (a small plastic blade is better than a large metal blade)
- * an ergonomically correct model (curved handle) may feel more comfortable to you and will help prevent injury and fatigue
- * if snow is sticking and adding weight spray the blade with a silicone-based lubricant (snow does not stick and slides off)

Technique- “ lift light, shovel right”

- * Always try to push snow rather than lifting it.
- * Protect your back by lifting properly and safely:
 - * stand with feet at hip width for balance
 - * hold the shovel close to your body
 - * space hands apart to increase leverage
 - * bend from your knees not your back
 - * tighten your stomach muscles while lifting
 - * avoid twisting while lifting
 - * walk to dump snow rather than throwing it
 - * when snow is deep, shovel small amounts (1-2 inches at a time) at a time
 - * wear good footwear for traction and be careful of slippery surfaces as this is the base where your power comes from

Knowledge-

- * Shovelling snow is strenuous activity that is very stressful on the heart. Take a break if you are tired and short of breath.
- * If you feel pain, don't push through it. You are better to take a break and evaluate how you are feeling rather than risk further injury

- * Stop shovelling and call 911 if you have:
 - ❄ Discomfort or heaviness in the chest, arms or neck
 - ❄ unusual or prolonged shortness of breath
 - ❄ a dizzy or faint feeling
 - ❄ excessive sweating or nausea and vomiting

I love the snow and all the winter activities that it provides. I even find as I am sure many of you do that I enjoy shovelling as an invigorating activity. I hope these suggestions help snow shovelling be a pleasurable and safe duty.