



## **Snow Shoveling Tips**

Snow shoveling is one of the most common causes of back injuries during the winter months. However, musculoskeletal pain after shoveling is avoidable if you know the best ways to get rid of the snow without straining your back.

### **Snow Shoveling Tips**

The American Chiropractic Association recommends the following tips:

- If you must shovel snow, be careful. Listen to weather forecasts so you can rise early and have time to shovel before work.
- Layer clothing to keep your muscles warm and flexible.
- Shoveling can strain “de-conditioned” muscles between your shoulders, in your upper back, lower back, buttocks, and legs. Do some warm-up stretching before you grab that shovel.
- When you do shovel, push the snow straight ahead. Don't try to throw it. Walk it to the snow bank. Avoid sudden twisting and turning motions. [See “Ergonomic Lifting Techniques” below.]
- Bend your knees to lift when shoveling. Let the muscles of your legs and arms do the work, not your back.
- Take frequent rest breaks to take the strain off your muscles. A fatigued body asks for injury.
- Stop if you feel chest pain, or get really tired or have shortness of breath. You may need immediate professional help.

### **Other helpful hints:**

- Use an ergonomic snow shovel, which can take some of the effort out of snow removal by minimizing bending. Also, a lightweight plastic shovel helps reduce the amount of weight you are moving.
- Pace yourself. If the snow is very deep, take a few inches off the top at a time, rather than attempting the full load. Take a break every 15-20 minutes or whenever you feel you need a break. Be sure to stretch your arms, shoulders, and back to keep them warm and flexible,

### **Ergonomic Lifting Techniques**

- Face the object you intend to lift. Make sure your shoulders and hips are both squarely facing it.
- Never bend at the low back. Bend at the knees instead.
- Bend your knees and lift with the leg muscles, not the back muscles.
- Keep loads light. Never lift anything you feel is too heavy for you.
- When shoveling, grip the shovel with one hand as close to the shovel's blade as comfortably possible. Keep your hands about a foot apart to provide greater stability and minimize the chances of injuring your low back.

The ACA recommends that after shoveling, if you are sore, apply an ice bag to the affected area for 20 minutes, then take it off for a couple of hours. Repeat a couple of times each day over the next day or two. If you continue to feel soreness, pain, or strain after following these tips, it may be time to visit a doctor of chiropractic.