

Winter Safety Tip – Snow Shovel Safety

Shoveling snow can be risky, but not if you do it right:

- Allow enough time. People get hurt when they try to shovel in a hurry. In the wintertime, leave time in your schedule for shoveling, and it will be a more pleasant, safer task.
- Should you be shoveling at all? As with any form of strenuous exercise, check with your doctor first. If you are older, overweight, or have a history of back or heart problems, or simply feel that it is too much for you, delegate the task to someone else or get a snow blower. Also, no one should shovel if the temperature drops below -40°C, or below -25° to -30°C when it is windy.
- Warm up first. Walk for a few minutes or march on the spot. Do a few flexing and stretching exercises so that the work doesn't come as a shock to your system.
- Wear several layers of warm, lightweight clothing in which you can move comfortably. The inner layer should be fishnet or thermal underwear that wicks perspiration away from the skin. Cover your head, especially your ears, feet and hands. Wear water-resistant, high-cut boots with good traction. In very cold weather, try to cover your face as much as possible.
- If the ground is icy or slippery, spread salt, sand or kitty litter to create better foot traction.
- Use a proper snow shovel. It should be light-weight, about 1.5 kg or a little over 3 lbs, and the blade shouldn't be too large. The handle should be long enough so that you don't have to stoop to shovel. The grip should be made of plastic or wood - metal gets too cold.
- Keep moving and work at a steady pace. Shovel only small, manageable amounts at a time. 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
 - Push the snow rather than lift it
 - Tighten your stomach muscles while lifting
 - Walk to dump snow rather than throwing it
 - If you must throw a load of snow, take only as much snow as you can easily lift. Turn your feet to the direction you're throwing and **DO NOT** twist at the waist or throw the snow over your shoulder or to the side.
- Recognize the danger signs. Stop shoveling and call 911 if you feel discomfort or heaviness in the chest, arms or neck; unusual or prolonged shortness of breath; a dizzy or faint feeling; or excessive sweating or nausea and vomiting.

Remember what others have learned the hard way. Shoveling snow is a strenuous activity that can take a heavy toll on your body and well-being.

Source: CCOHS