



# CIRSA HAZARD ALERT

Published by the CIRSA Loss Control Department

SAFER TOGETHER

## Hazard Alert – Snow Shoveling



Bending and heavy lifting required by shoveling snow can put an individual at serious risk for sprains and strains to the back, shoulders or knees. A national study in the American Journal of Emergency Medicine estimates that U.S. hospitals treat 11,500 snow shoveling related injuries and related medical emergencies every year.

Shoveling is not safe for everyone. While some may get a workout shoveling snow, others may be putting themselves at risk. According to the National Safety Council (NSC) anyone 40 or older and those who are not routinely active should take extra caution when shoveling. The combination of cold (which can cause blood vessels to constrict, decreasing blood supply) and the strenuous exertion of shoveling (which can quickly increase heart rate and blood pressure) raises the risk for a heart attack. Don't pick up that shovel without a doctor's permission if you have a history of heart disease.

Snow shoveling is a vigorous physical activity and it's important to ease into it, practice proper technique, and rest when needed.

### Recommended Practices:

- Wear layered clothing that is water-resistant and provides insulation and ventilation. Also, keep your head and hands covered and wear heavy socks with slip-resistant boots.
- Warm your muscles up before shoveling snow, much like you would before a workout at the gym. March in place for a few minutes and stretch to help reduce the risk of injury.
- To help make the labor less intensive, consider staying ahead of the snow and start shoveling shortly after the snow begins falling. The Snow and Ice Management Association recommends clearing sidewalks or driveways after every few inches of accumulation, so the snow doesn't freeze and become harder to scrape from the ground.
- When possible, push snow to avoid lifting and throwing it which may put extra stress on your back.
- If you do lift it, scoop small amounts of snow into the shovel and walk to where you want to dump it.
- Lift with your legs, not your back.

# CIRSA HAZARD ALERT

---

## *Snow Shoveling (cont.)*

- Never remove deep snow all at once—this is particularly important in the case of heavy, wet snow. Do it in layers.
- Consider using an ergonomic shovel which is typically much lighter than a standard shovel and has a contoured handle designed to reduce or eliminate bending and decrease lifting.
- Try coating the shovel pan with cooking spray, vegetable oil or wax which will act as a lubricant, preventing the snow from sticking to the shovel.
- Take frequent breaks and prevent dehydration by drinking plenty of fluids. If you experience chest pain, shortness of breath, or other signs of a heart attack, stop the activity and seek emergency care.

### Resources:

Snow shovel-related injuries and medical emergencies treated in US EDs, 1990 to 2006 Daniel S Watson, Brenda J Shields, Gary A Smith

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20825768/>

<https://nyc.heart.org/2017/12/14/american-heart-association-warns-snow-shoveling-health-hazards/>

<https://www.ehstoday.com/safety/article/21916100/offthejob-safety-getting-a-handle-on-proper-snowshoveling-techniques>

<https://www.nsc.org/home-safety/tools-resources/seasonal-safety/winter/snow-shoveling>