



## Safe Snow Shoveling Tips

We have rarely heard anyone talking about how much they enjoy shoveling snow, but because we live in New England, it is part of our winter. Here are some simple tips that can help you with clearing the snow as it starts to fall this winter.

- **Stay ahead of the snow when you can.** To prevent snow and ice from sticking and piling up clear the snow every few inches instead of waiting for the snow to stop falling before you head outdoors. It will be lighter and easier to move.
- **Don't shovel the same snow twice.** Avoid creating huge piles right along the edge of your driveway or sidewalks. For one thing, some of that snow can end up tumbling down back into your driveway, meaning you have to remove it twice. Instead, try to toss each shovel-full a decent distance away from your driveway or sidewalk. You'll be glad you did when another storm hits soon after and you don't have a huge snow berm to throw over (or move twice) to clear your driveway!
- **Wear breathable layers.** Layering is typical cold winter weather advice. Wear layers of loose clothing so you can peel a layer off if you get hot. Avoid wearing heavy wools, manmade materials or other materials that don't allow perspiration to evaporate. Better choices are cotton and silk.
- **Be good to your feet and they will be good to you.** Wearing quality outdoor winter wear such as waterproof boots with good traction should be in your plan. Old canvas sneakers with worn out soles just aren't going to give you the warmth and good footing you need. Good traction is critical to ensuring that you don't slip and fall and end up at the emergency room.
- **Take a few minutes to stretch.** Shoveling snow can really be a workout so you need to stretch to warm up your muscles particularly because you are shoveling snow in the cold weather. Stretching before you start shoveling will help prevent injury and fatigue...and stretching afterwards can help prevent some of that next day soreness. (see our post shoveling stretching program)
- **Push don't lift when you can.** Pushing snow along your driveway, sidewalk or porch is generally a better ergonomic approach versus trying to lift the snow to remove it. You exert less energy thereby placing less stress on your body. When you do have to lift, follow these tips:
  - Bend your knees and lift with your legs
  - As you lift the snow, keep the shovel blade close to you, to reduce back strain
  - Switch off between snow shoveling right-handed and left-handed, so that you're working different muscles
  - When the snowfall is heavy (1 foot in depth, let's say), don't try to clean right down to the ground with a single scoop. Instead, skim the top 6 inches off, then scoop up the bottom 6 inches. A full shovel of heavy wet snow can be up to 25 pounds!
- **Wax your shovel blade.** To prevent heavy snow from sticking, use a car wax, silicone spray or even some cooking spray on the blade of your shovel. It will help to keep the snow from sticking to your shovel and make it much easier to move the snow.
- **Hydrate, Hydrate, Hydrate:** As we have mentioned before, shoveling can be a real workout, so commit to taking frequent breaks and staying hydrated. You should drink water as if you were enduring a tough workout at the gym or running five miles.
- **Be aware of your surroundings.** Moving snow from around cars or close to the street can be dangerous. Look out for plow trucks or cars that may not see you. Wear bright colored clothing or even a headlamp to help others see you, even if you can't see them.
- **Keep your phone handy.** Every year at Blue Hills Sports & Spine, we hear of patients that have fallen or injured themselves while out shoveling who have to wait for someone to find them because they didn't have their phone with them while shoveling. Seems like a simple thing to do and may just help you out if you get in a bad spot.

Overall, very few people really enjoy shoveling, but following these simple tips may make it a little easier.