



Safe Snow Shovelling

Jo-Ann Scott-Noye, Physiotherapist
www.physioworksairdrie.ca

YUP! Snow season is here and there are probably a few people out there with sore backs from shovelling snow; in fact just today 2 of my regular patients came in complaining of sore backs from shovelling. Don't let winter get the best of you, help keep your back healthy this winter season.

Your back is like a long lever arm. The further away you have the weight, the more strain it is on your back. Think of how much heavier a weight feels when it is held out in front of the body rather than at the side. This is because gravity exerts a great force on the weight and the muscles that support us have to work that much harder to counteract the effects of gravity.

Your shovelling technique is very important. The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons recommends: "If you must lift the snow, lift it properly. Squat with your legs apart, knees bent and back straight. Lift with your legs. Do not bend at the waist. Scoop small amounts of snow into the shovel and walk to where you want to dump it. Holding a shovel of snow with your arms outstretched puts too much weight on your spine. Never remove deep snow all at once; do it in little bits. Shovel an inch or two; then take another inch off. Rest and repeat if necessary."



Some other tips that may help you prevent injuring your back include;

- Choose a snow shovel that is right for you! A curved handle helps you to keep your back straighter when shovelling. Get a shovel that is comfortable when your knees are slightly bent and back is bent forward no more than 10 degrees. A plastic shovel blade is lighter than a metal one, thus you have to lift less weight with each stroke. Avoid a blade that is too large; a large shovel will lift more (ie HEAVIER!) snow.
- Push the snow when possible. Pushing puts far less strain on the spine than lifting.
- Never throw over your shoulder. This forces the spine to be twisted as you are loading it and places you at risk of injury.
- Do a light warm up before hand. One full load of snow may weigh as much as 25 lbs so prepare your muscles beforehand with some gentle movement to get the blood flowing to the muscles.
- Take regular breaks. Remember that snow shovelling is a strenuous activity. If you are not physically fit, doing too much at once puts you at risk of injury.
- Grip the shovel at least 12 inches apart. This increases your leverage AND will prevent you from stooping over to shovel.
- Move with your feet, not with your back. Keep your nose and toes in the same direction!

If you experience any pain, stop and seek the advice of a Physiotherapist, Chiropractor or Doctor. **You do not need a referral from a medical doctor to seek the services of a Physiotherapist. We direct bill to many extended health plans, making it easier for you.**

We hope you stay healthy this winter season. Should you experience and discomfort or injury, the staff at PhysioWorks are always available to answer your questions.

