

Six Steps to Safe Shovelling

The leaves are turning, many have fallen and winter is just around the corner. With the arrival of snow comes skiing, sleigh rides, tobogganing and inevitably shovelling. Shovelling is very strenuous work, and can be the cause of various muscle and joint problems including back pain. In some cases it can even lead to something more serious, such as a heart attack.

If you have had a relatively inactive summer, or have pre-existing back or heart problems you should consult your health care practitioner for advice on whether or not you should undertake the task of shovelling. Once you have determined that it is safe for you to tackle the snow, following these six simple steps will help you to avoid unnecessary injury:

1. Choose a shovel that is lightweight (i.e. 3lb) to avoid excess stress on the body. Also, select a shovel with a handle that comes up to chest level. This will give you more leverage and decrease the amount of bending necessary.
2. Always dress appropriately for the weather conditions and warm up for 5-10 minutes prior to starting. A short walk around the block or jogging in place will increase circulation and reduce the likelihood of muscle strain.
3. Take your time! Remember the 15-15-15 rule. Shovel at a rate of about 15 scoops per minute, taking a 15-minute break after every 15 minutes of work. This will ensure that the job is done as quickly as possible, with the least fatigue.
4. Each scoop of snow should weigh no more than 10-15 lb and should be thrown no more than one metre upwards or in front of you.
5. Always keep your feet wide apart and place your front foot close to the shovel. Put your weight on the front foot and use your leg to push the shovel and collect snow. Then, shift your weight to the rear foot and lift, keeping the load close to your body. If you need to throw the snow to the side, turn your feet in that direction rather than your upper body.
6. After shovelling always stretch the muscles in your shoulders, arms, back and legs to prevent soreness and strain. Muscles respond best to stretching after activity when they are the warmest. Your health professional can help to provide appropriate stretches for you. If you do suffer an injury, contact your family physician or chiropractor immediately.

So bundle up and follow these simple tips to safely enjoy another fabulous Nova Scotian winter!

For further information, please call Dr. Godin at 435-WELL.