

# A Safer Way to Shovel Snow



Many people know that shoveling snow can put many at risk for back injury or a heart attack, but think, “It won’t happen to me” and shovel anyway.

Shoveling snow strains the back, because you bend at the waist to lift a load. And shoveling can trigger a heart attack in three ways. The increase in activity requires your heart to work harder. Also, without realizing it, you may hold your breath as you lift, which can trigger a sudden rise in heart rate and blood pressure. And cold weather causes blood vessels to constrict, so the heart has to pump more blood.

If you have a history of back problems or heart problems, don’t shovel snow, period. Have someone else do it. If you’re over age 40 and overweight, if you have high blood pressure, if you smoke, or if you lead a sedentary life, check with your doctor before lifting a shovel.

The following hints can help make a tough job easier, even if you’re not at special risk for back or heart problems.

- Dress properly. Protect your head and hands from the cold, and don’t bundle up so much that you overheat or can’t move freely.
- To prevent back strain, keep your knees slightly bent and both feet planted firmly on the ground or pavement.
- Consider removing snow with a snowblower or plow instead of a shovel—it’s far less stressful and gets the job done quickly.