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Tips to Prevent Snow Shoveling and Snow Blowing Injuries

Cleaning up mounds of snow can cause more pain than just a headache. While this seasonal activity may seem mundane, it can also be dangerous.

According to the U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission:

- In 2006, more than 31,000 people were treated in hospital emergency rooms, doctors' offices, clinics and other medical settings for injuries that happened while shoveling or removing ice and snow manually.
- More than 5,000 were injured using snowblowers.
- Types of injuries can include sprains and strains, particularly in the back and shoulders, as well as lacerations and finger amputations.



The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS) offers the following tips for safe snow clearing:

- Check with your doctor. Because this activity places high stress on the heart, you should always speak with your doctor before shoveling or snow blowing. If you have a medical condition or do not exercise regularly, consider hiring someone to remove the snow.
- Dress appropriately. Light, layered, water-repellent clothing provides both ventilation and insulation. It is also important to wear the appropriate head coverings, as well as mittens or gloves and thick, warm socks. Avoid falls by wearing shoes or boots that have slip-resistant soles.
- Try to clear snow early and often. Begin shoveling/blowing when a light covering of snow is on the ground to avoid dealing with packed, heavy snow.
- Be sure you can see what you are shoveling/blowing. Do not let a hat or scarf block your vision. Watch for ice patches and uneven surfaces.

Shoveling tips:

- Warm-up your muscles. Shoveling can be a vigorous activity. Before you begin this physical workout, warm-up your muscles for 10 minutes with light exercise.
- Pace yourself. Snow shoveling and blowing are aerobic activities. 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 shoveling/blowing and seek emergency care.

- Use a shovel that is comfortable for your height and strength. Do not use a shovel that is too heavy or too long for you. Space your hands on the tool grip to increase your leverage.
- Try to push the snow instead of lifting it. If you must lift, do 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 shovelful of snow with your arms outstretched puts too much weight on your spine. Never remove deep snow all at once. Do it in pieces.
- Do not throw the snow over your shoulder or to the side. This requires a twisting motion that stresses your back.

Snowblowing tips:

- Never stick your hands in the snow blower! If snow jams the snowblower, stop the engine and wait more than 5 seconds. Use a solid object to clear wet snow or debris from the chute. Beware of the recoil of the motor and blades after the machine has been turned off.
- Do not leave the snow blower unattended when it is running. Shut off the engine if you must walk away from the machine.
- Add fuel before starting the snow blower. Never add fuel when the engine is running or hot. Do not operate the machine in an enclosed area.
- Stay away from the engine. It can become very hot and burn unprotected flesh.
- Watch the snow blower cord. If you are operating an electric snow blower, be aware of where the power cord is at all times.
- Do not remove safety devices, shields or guards on switches, and keep hands and feet away from moving parts.
- Beware of the brief recoil of motor and blades that occurs after the machine has been turned off.
- Never let children operate snowblowers. Keep children 15 years of age and younger away when snowblowers are in use.
- Read the instruction manual prior to using a snow blower. You need to be familiar with the specific safety hazards and unfamiliar features. Do not attempt to repair or maintain the snow blower without reading the instruction manual.

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