

## **Shoveling doesn't need to be a pain in the ...back!**

Now that winter has finally arrived, many of us will be faced with a nemesis: the shovel. If you must shovel snow, be careful. Shoveling is strenuous exercise for the cardiovascular and muscular systems. Listen to the weather forecast so you can rise early and have time to shovel before work. Otherwise, you may be so pressed for time, you'll be careless. Shoveling can strain de-conditioned muscles between your shoulders, in your upper back, lower back, buttocks and legs. So do some warm-up stretches before you grab that shovel. Plan between 5 and 10 minutes to do your warm-up, which should include walking in place, going up and down steps, side bending of the torso and bending forward at the hips. Follow-up with light stretches of the arms, shoulders and legs.

It will often be to your advantage to hire someone to shovel for you. Not only are you giving a student some spending money, you are also protecting your back (saving you money in chiropractic care!). It is also wise to hire someone with a plow or to use a snowblower. If you must shovel, choose one that is appropriate for you. It should be made of lightweight material and the blade shouldn't be too wide. Otherwise you will end up putting too much snow in it, leading to injury. Shovels are now available with an ergonomic handle and it should be long enough so that you don't have to bend.

When shoveling, push the snow straight ahead, without lifting it and don't try to throw it. Walk it to the snow bank. Avoid sudden twisting and turning motions as this puts tremendous stress on your back and can cause a herniated disc. Remember to keep your nose aligned with your toes. Bend your knees to lift when shoveling and let your legs and arms do the work, not your back which should be kept very straight. It is best to not wait for the storm to be over, but rather to shovel 2-3 times to not allow snow to accumulate.

Stop if you feel chest pain, become very tired or experience shortness of breath when undertaking any strenuous winter activity. You may need immediate professional help. If you feel sore after any of these activities, apply an ice bag to the affected area for 10-15 minutes, then take it off for a couple of hours. Do not use heat. It will worsen the swelling associated with muscle strain. Never use ice before you shovel.

Take frequent rest breaks to ease the strain on your muscles. This is especially important when the snow is wet and heavy. Remember, shoveling isn't a race! Since we will be shoveling for the next few months, why not turn it into a family affair. Instead of being a dreaded chore, it can be a great way for you and your family to spend time together, being outdoors and being active. Be careful, but most of all have fun!