



Winter is here in full force: Tips for Snow Shoveling

1. Pick the right snow shovel

An ergonomic snow shovel can help take some of the effort out of your snow removal chores. A shovel with a curved handle or an adjustable handle length will minimize painful bending, requiring you to bend your knees only slightly and arch your back very slightly while keeping the shovel blade on the ground. In addition, a small, lightweight, plastic blade helps reduce the amount of weight that you are moving.

2. Warm up thoroughly

Cold, tight muscles are more prone to injury than warmed up, flexible muscles. Do your back a favor by warming up for five to ten minutes before shoveling or any strenuous activity. Get your blood moving with a brisk walk, marching in place, or another full-body activity. Then, stretch your low back and hamstrings (the large muscles in the back of the thigh) with some gentle stretching exercises. Limber up your arms and shoulders with a body hug.

3. Pace yourself during snow removal

Removing small amounts of snow frequently is less strenuous than removing a large pile at once. If possible, removing snow over a period of days will lessen the strain on the back and arms. In deep snow, remove a few inches at a time, rather than attempting to shovel the full depth at once. When shoveling, take a break for a minute or two every 10-15 minutes or if you feel overworked at any point. Use this opportunity to stretch your arms, shoulders, and back to keep them warm and flexible.

4. Use ergonomic lifting techniques

Whenever possible, push the snow to one side rather than lifting it. When lifting the snow shovel is necessary, make sure to use ergonomic lifting techniques:

- Always face towards the object you intend to lift
- Bend at the hips, not the low back, and push your chest out. Then bend your knees and lift with your leg muscles, keeping your back straight.
- Keep your loads light and do not lift an object that is too heavy for you.
- If you must lift a shovel full, grip the shovel with one hand as close to the blade as comfortably possible and the other hand on the handle (handle and arm length will vary with technique)
- Avoid twisting the back to move your object to its new location – always pivot your whole body to face the new direction.
- Keep the heaviest part of the object close to your body at your center of gravity.
- Walk to the new location to deposit the item rather than reaching or tossing.
- When gripping the shovel, keep your hands about 12 inches apart to provide greater stability and minimize the chances of injuring your low back.

5. Keep your feet on the ground

Slippery conditions while shoveling can lead to slipping and/or falls and strains that can injure your back. Shoes or boots with good treads will help to minimize injuries from slipping. Spreading sand, rock salt, or kitty litter on your sidewalk or driveway will increase traction and reduce the likelihood of slipping on the ice.

6. Be a good neighbor

Elderly residents or residents with health problems that prevent them from shoveling snow may need help with their snow removal. Using your new knowledge about ergonomic snow shoveling, you can help your neighbors remain active and mobile during the winter months and help prevent them from sustaining an injury from icy walkways or trying to remove the snow themselves. If low back pain, recent back injury, or another back condition makes shoveling a hazardous task for you, ask for help from your neighbors or a snow removal service rather than attempting to remove the snow yourself.

These tips can help to make snow removal less of a strain on your low back. Keeping these guidelines in mind during the winter season will lessen the chances of a new back injury or worsening your low back pain while shoveling, and hopefully make your winter a healthier and more enjoyable experience.