

SNOW SHOVELING SAFETY

When winter arrives—often bringing low temperatures and snowfall with it—the seasonal transition may require you to start periodically shoveling snow. Although this task is necessary to help clear pathways and prevent ice buildup, shoveling snow comes with serious safety risks.

After all, repeated shoveling requires significant physical exertion, which, when paired with the frigid outdoor elements, can take a dangerous toll on your body. That's why it's crucial to utilize proper precautions while you shovel snow.

Review the following guidance to learn more about the risks of shoveling snow and what you can do to protect yourself.

THE RISKS OF SHOVELING SNOW

The most prevalent risks associated with shoveling snow include:

Sprains and Strains

Because shoveling requires you to repeatedly move potentially heavy amounts of snow in an awkward position for an extended period, this task can easily cause sprains and strains if you aren't careful. These injuries typically occur in your wrists, shoulders, back and ankles.

Hypothermia

Working in cold weather can heighten your risk of experiencing hypothermia, which occurs when your body's core temperature falls below 95 degrees Fahrenheit. Symptoms of hypothermia include shivering, drowsiness, shallow breathing, confusion, slurred speech, loss of coordination and unconsciousness. Severe cases of hypothermia can be fatal.

Frostbite

Working in chilly conditions can also increase your risk of developing frostbite, which entails a freezing of the skin and its underlying tissues. Frostbite can result in stinging, numbness and blistering in the affected areas (usually your fingers, toes or face). If left untreated, frostbite can cause permanent tissue damage.

Heart Complications

If you overexert yourself while shoveling snow, the cold weather could contribute to a sharp rise in your heart rate and blood pressure, thus decreasing your overall blood supply and potentially causing a heart attack—which could be fatal.

GENERAL BEST PRACTICES

Here are some basic safety precautions to keep in mind when shoveling snow:

- Avoid shoveling immediately after eating or while smoking.
- Take a few minutes to stretch before you begin shoveling to better prepare your body for the physical demands of the task.
- Try to push the snow instead of lifting it. If you must lift snow while shoveling, use a smaller shovel or only partially fill your shovel with snow to avoid lifting too much at a time. In addition, be sure to lift with your legs rather than your back.
- Don't overexert yourself. Pay attention to how you feel while you shovel—never work to the point of exhaustion. If you begin to feel overly fatigued, stop shoveling and inform your supervisor.
- When handling large amounts of snow, consider utilizing a snow blower rather than a shovel to avoid the extra labor. However, make sure you are properly trained to do so. Always consult your supervisor before making any equipment changes.
- Make sure you know the key signs of a heart attack (e.g., chest discomfort, shortness of breath and pain in the arms, back, neck, jaw or stomach). If you start to experience these symptoms, stop shoveling and call 911 (or ask someone to call for you, if necessary).

HOW TO PREVENT HYPOTHERMIA AND FROSTBITE

Be sure to implement these additional safety measures to prevent hypothermia and frostbite:

- Always check the weather before working outdoors to properly prepare yourself. Try to limit your time shoveling if weather conditions are extremely cold, wet or windy.
- Make sure you dress appropriately for the task at hand. Wear several loose layers of clothing, a warm hat that fully covers your head and ears, mittens (rather than gloves) and thick socks that will keep your feet dry.

SAFETY FIRST

Your safety is our first priority. Talk to your supervisor if you have any further questions or concerns about shoveling snow.