



Snow Shoveling Techniques to Prevent Low Back Injuries

One of the more common causes of back injuries during the winter months is snow removal. Using the wrong body mechanics when shoveling snow can put undue stress on the lower back and lead to a painful muscle strain, or possibly more serious back injuries, such as a herniated disc or disc degeneration.

The following snow removal tips can help you to avoid low back injuries and pain during the snowy winter season.

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.

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.

Pace Yourself

Shoveling small amounts of snow frequently is less strenuous than shoveling 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 off the top 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.

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 (ie Have your shoulders and hips both squarely facing it)
- * Bend at the hips, not the low back, and push the chest out, pointing forward. Then, bend your knees and lift with your legs 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 the 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- do not extend your arms to throw the snow
- * 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.

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.

If Possible, Stop shoveling- Use a Snow Blower Instead

When used correctly, a snow blower can put less stress on your low back than shoveling. Avoid stressing your back by using the power of your legs to push the snow blower while keeping your back straight and knees bent.

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 developing a new low back problem or worsening your low back pain while shoveling, and hopefully make your winter a healthier and more enjoyable experience.

Call Pearson Physical Therapy at 308-872-5800 if you are experiencing back pain for any reason. Our therapist's are equipped to help you strengthen the muscles that support your back so you will greatly reduce your chances of injury and/or pain.



The Sno Wovel™ (pictured above) a wheeled snow shovel is designed to greatly reduce the physical strain of shoveling and the related risks of back and heart injuries. The Sno Wovel™ wheeled snow shovel was the subject of an independent study which focused on lower back stress and overall exertion as compared to traditional snow shovels. The results are quite compelling, finding the Sno Wovel™; virtually eliminated lower back stress ... "comparable to simply walking - representing an impressive 85% and more reduction in lower back disk compression." Overall exertion (which is one of the major factors in heart risk) was found to be reduced by a factor of 3x or more. ..and with 72,000 annual emergency room visits annually in the US attributable to shoveling with snow shovels and snow blowers, the Sno Wovel has earned its reputation as the World's Safest Snow Shovel!

Stop by Pracht's Ace Hardware at 747 South C, Broken Bow to purchase "The Wovel" pictured above, or call Rod at 872-2449 for more information.

Would you like Pearson Physical Therapy to come & speak to your church, school or civic group? Call 308-872-5800 to find out our list of topics.



On the Radio!!

Listen to the Breakfast Show on KCNI-1280 every 1st Thursday of the month at 9 a.m. to hear one of our therapists talk about physical therapy & topics relative to you & your health.

Avoid Slips and Falls in Icy Conditions

Slips and falls in icy conditions are a common problem. But there are things that we can all do to reduce the risk of getting hurt. Follow the guidelines below if you do have to go out in icy conditions.

Tips for avoiding slips and falls:

You should:

- think about the best route to your destination and plan on a little extra time to get there
- avoid rushing or taking shortcuts over areas where snow or ice removal is incomplete
- select appropriate footwear - flat footwear with rubber soles provides better traction on ice and snow than leather-soled or high-heeled shoes
- use handrails where you can
- take small steps to keep your center of balance under you
- avoid carrying lots of heavy shopping bags, especially on steps
- walk slowly and never run on icy ground
- keep both hands free for balance, rather than in your pockets
- always be aware of your surroundings
- be particularly careful getting into and out of vehicles - and hold on to the vehicle for support
- keep paths clear of debris, water, ice and snow
- be sure to use floor mats when entering a building to remove moisture from the soles of your shoes - this will help protect you, as well as others who follow, from having to walk on wet or slippery surfaces



Helping the elderly

The elderly are particularly vulnerable during periods of cold weather. If you have an elderly parent, relative or neighbor, you can help them avoid injury. For example, you could offer to do their shopping for them and/or salt their sidewalk & front entry.

For more tips on balance & falls call Pearson Physical Therapy at 308-872-5800 for an evaluation.

Product Highlight

Therapeutica Sleeping Pillow

This pillow doesn't look like what you would expect – that's because it was designed by an Ergonomic Designer. The goal to a sound sleep is 'Spinal Alignment'. Because you sleep on your back, side, or both, this pillow was created to work for each sleeping position. The ergonomic design offers correct support and stability in sleeping posture. The result is a more sound sleep and less tendency to wake with pain, stiffness and many of the symptoms resulting from lack of support.

- Five sizes for a custom fit
- Five-year warranty not to lose shape or resilience
- Comes with a free-fitted polyester/cotton machine washable zippered pillow cover
- Child, Petite and Average fit into a standard pillow case. Large and X-Large a king-size pillow case
- Made of non-allergenic, non-toxic foam that can be recycled where applicable
- Not only an investment in a pillow, but an investment in your future health



Available for purchase at Pearson Physical Therapy