Snow Removal Safety
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Looking out your window and seeing mounds of snow can give you a headache. You know you need to get the shovel out and get to work. Muscle soreness, back strains and heart attacks are just a few problems associated with shoveling snow. Snow is heavy and can put a strain on the body causing strains, sprain and much worse.

Shoveling snow is like any other exercise. You need to warm up the muscles to avoid pulls and strains. Walk or march in place for a few minutes. Warm up the arms and upper back. Once you get outside and start shoveling, stand with your feet about hip width for better balance and keep the shovel close to the body. As you lift the shovel bend the knees and tighten the stomach muscles. This will protect the lower back. Always face the direction where the snow will be going. Many back injuries occur when you twist to throw the snow off the shovel.

There are other considerations when getting ready to shovel snow. If you smoke, you need to delay having a cigarette. Like cold air, tobacco constricts blood vessels making them smaller. The combination can be dangerous. Avoid caffeinated products before going outside. Caffeine increases the heart rate and causes blood vessels to constrict. Blood flow to muscles is decreased making shoveling harder. Water is best. Stay hydrated in cold weather, just like you would in hot weather.

Dress in layers for better warmth. Include a hat and something to cover your neck. Shoes should have slip-resistant soles to avoid falls.

There are safety tips for shoveling, removing ice and using a snow blower. According the U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission, more than 118,000 people are treated in hospital emergency rooms, doctor’s offices, clinics or other medical settings for injuries that occurred while shoveling snow or removing ice. In addition, more than 16,000 people were injured using snow blowers. Follow these safety tips to avoid injuries.

- When shoveling snow pace yourself. Snow removal is a vigorous activity. If you experience chest pain, shortness of breath or other signs of a heart attack, stop and call 9-1-1.

- Use a shovel that is comfortable for your height and strength. Push the snow rather than lift the snow. If you must lift the snow, use your legs. Do not bend at the waist. Shovel often. It is easier to shovel two inches of snow several times than 10 inches of snow one time. If you must wait until the snow ends, shovel the snow in layers to avoid lifting snow that is too heavy for you.
When walking on an icy surface, watch out for black ice. The almost invisible ice accumulates on any type of surface including decks, steps and sidewalks. Black ice is a major reason for falls since it is hard to see. Using rock salt is an effective way to melt ice or snow, but it is corrosive. Magnesium chloride is less damaging and works well.

- Before using any ice melting product, read the label. Many chemicals are harmful to animals and plants.
- You can also use bird seed, kitty litter or cracked corn for traction. Remember, these products do not melt ice.

When using a snow blower, always make sure that your vision is not blocked by a hat or scarf. Do not leave the blower unattended. If snow jams the snow blower, turn the engine off before removing debris.

- Keep hands and feet away moving parts. Do not remove shields or guards.
- The machine and blades will recoil when turned off.
- The engine becomes hot and can burn.
- Watch the snow blower cord. Be aware of the cord at all times.

Whether you remove snow or ice, follow simple rules to avoid injury. And remember, it doesn’t have to be done all at once. Take your time and be careful.