Every year, numerous snowstorms bring thousands of people into emergency rooms nationwide with a variety of injuries. Here, some interesting tidbits about the dangers of shoveling, as well as preventative measures you can take to ensure the snow doesn’t keep you hobbled this season.

Facts About Snow Shoveling Injuries
• There are 11,500 emergency room visits each year due to snow shoveling injuries.
• Nearly 100 deaths each year are attributed to heart injuries while snow shoveling.
• Soft tissue (muscle, tendon, ligaments, etc.) injuries are the most common, followed by lacerations and fractures.
• The lower back is the most injured body part, followed by arm/hand and then head injuries.
• Over-exertion of muscles, slips/falls, and being struck by a shovel are the most common causes of snow shovel related injury.

Heart Injuries
• Although only 7% of injuries are cardiac related, they account for more than half of hospitalizations, and 100% of deaths.
• If over the age of 55, you are more than 4 times more likely to experience cardiac symptoms while shoveling.
• Men are twice as likely as women to have cardiac-related symptoms.
• The cold weather increases blood pressure and heart rate as your heart works harder to keep your body warm.
• Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and cigarettes especially right before or during shoveling, as these substances tend to increase blood pressure and have long lasting impact on your health.

Preventing Injury
• Perform a light warm up prior to shoveling to prepare the muscles and heart for work.
• Pace yourself and take frequent breaks; Shovel multiple times throughout the day if a large amount of snowfall is expected, starting early, to decrease stress on body.
• If the snow is already deep, remove a couple of inches at a time from the top of the pile. Do not try to move the whole pile!
• Use an ergonomic shovel.
• Dress warm and wear shoes that have good treads to prevent slips/falls.
• If possible push snow, rather than lifting.
• If you must lift the snow, keep the load in front of your body.
• Bend at the hips and knees to use your legs to lift the shovel, not your back. Tighten your abs while maintaining a neutral spine(slight arch of low back).
• Never lift snow and twist your body at the same time; take a step and pivot to change direction.
• Walk the snow and place it, and avoid throwing the snow.
• Keep your hands about 12 inches apart on the shovel and keep the shovel close to your body.
• If you have known heart or lung problems, try to avoid shoveling - that’s what kids are for!
• Listen to your body; if you feel short of breath, have chest pains or trouble breathing, stop immediately. If symptoms persist after termination of shoveling, make sure to seek medical help right away.

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