

PROTECTING YOUR BACK DURING THE WINTER SEASON

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The winter season is upon us and extra precaution must be taken as snow removal and icy walking surfaces can contribute to an increased risk of back injuries. Included below are some useful tips that can be followed to help keep your back healthy and injury free this winter season.

1. **Warm up:** Prepare your body for physical activity by stimulating the joints and muscles, and increasing blood circulation. Climbing stairs, marching on the spot, or going for a quick walk around the block can serve as excellent warm-up activities in five to ten minutes. Follow this with some gentle stretches and exercises for the back.



2. **Push, don't lift:** Push the snow to one side and avoid lifting. If you must lift, keep the shovel close to your body and avoid twisting and turning by positioning yourself to lift and throw straight at the snow pile. Be sure to lift slowly and smoothly and do not jerk with your lifts.

3. **Hinge the hips, bend the knees, keep the back straight and brace:** Use your hips, knees, legs and arm muscles to do the pushing and lifting while keeping your back straight. Maintaining the natural and neutral curves of your back is important, as this is its strongest and most secure position. Contracting and bracing your abdominal muscles during lifting improves spinal stability and decreases the chance of injury.

4. **Use the right shovel:** Use a lightweight, non-stick, push-style shovel. Separate your hands as much as possible on the shovel handle for better leverage against the weight of the snow.

5. **Dress for the job:** Wear warm clothing to protect yourself against the elements. Shoes and boots with solid treads and soles can help minimize the risk of awkward twisting, slips and falls.

6. **Don't let the snow pile up:** Removing small amounts of snow on a frequent basis is less strenuous in the long run.



7. **Watch the ice:** Caution should be exercised around icy walkways and slippery surfaces. Intermittent thaws and subsequent freezing can give way to ice build-up under foot increasing the risk of back twisting, slips and falls. Coarse sand or ice salt can help give your walkways and driveways more traction.

8. **Take a break:** Know your physical limits. If you feel tired or short of breath, stop and take a rest. Make a habit to rest for a moment every 10 or 15 minutes during shoveling. This is especially important if the snow is wet and heavy. Stop shoveling immediately if you feel chest or back pain.

In the event that you suffer a back injury that does not subside, you should contact a licensed health professional who deals in the diagnosis and treatment of back pain. For more information, visit www.nhwc.ca.

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