



American Physical Therapy Association
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Talking Points: Physical Therapists Offer Snow Shovelers Advice To Avoid Injuries

These talking points were developed for you, the APTA member. They are taken from APTA's feature news release on snow shoveling. They may be used as an outline for presentations or as talking points for media interviews. We encourage you to add your own information and experience. This subject also lends itself well to a demonstration of proper snow shoveling for added interest!

- Snow shoveling is a repetitive activity that can cause muscle strain to the lower back and shoulders.
- Back injuries due to snow shoveling are more likely to happen to people between 20 and 50, because this age group may not know that they are out of condition.
- If possible, wait until the afternoon to shovel. Many disc injuries happen in the morning when there is increased fluid pressure in the disc.
- Lift smaller loads of snow, rather than heavy shovelfuls. Be sure to take care to bend your knees and lift with your legs rather than your back.
- Use a shovel with a shaft that lets you keep your back straight while lifting. A short shaft will cause you to bend more to lift the load. Using a shovel that's too long makes the weight at the end heavier.
- Avoid excessive twisting and forward bending, because the spine cannot tolerate twisting as well as it can other movements.
- Bend your knees and keep your back as straight as possible so that you are lifting with your legs. Step in the direction in which you are throwing the snow to prevent the low back from twisting. This will help prevent "next-day back fatigue."
- Take frequent breaks when shoveling. Stand up straight and walk around periodically to extend the lower back.
- Standing extension exercises will help reverse the excessive forward bending of shoveling: stand straight and tall, place your hands toward the back of your hips, and bend backwards slightly for several seconds.
- If you or anyone you know is experiencing back pain, consult a physical therapist.

The American Physical Therapy Association is a national professional organization representing more than 66,000 physical therapists, physical therapist assistants, and students. Its goal is to foster improvements in physical therapy practice, research and education.

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