

How to Stay Safe While Shoveling Snow



Frederick hasn't seen a big snow storm yet, but winter is officially here and bringing with it frigid temperatures, the possibility of heavy snow, and dangerous ice. While it's exciting to be outside during a snowfall, it can be hazardous as well, especially when it comes to shoveling your driveway and sidewalk. Snow removal accounts for thousands of injuries each year.

[According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, in 2015:](#)

- More than 158,000 people were treated in emergency rooms, doctor's offices, and clinics for injuries that happened while shoveling or removing ice and snow manually
- More than 15,000 people were injured using snow blowers.
- The most common injuries associated with snow removal include sprains and strains in the back and shoulders, as well as serious cuts and finger amputations.

Tips to Prevent Injuries During Snow Removal

Snow removal, whether by shovel or snow blower, can be difficult and dangerous if not done correctly. To help keep you, your family, and neighbors safe and healthy this winter, we recommend following these snow removal tips:

- **Dress appropriately – wear multiple layers.** Even if it doesn't feel like it's very cold, always wear multiple layers, make sure there are no holes in any of your clothing items, and choose gloves and shoes that are water repellant to protect your hands and feet.
- **Start while the snow accumulation is light—don't wait.** When heavy snowfall is in the forecast, make sure to start snow removal early. This will help to reduce the amount of snow you have to remove throughout the storm, as well as reduce the risk of injury.
- **Warm up your muscles before starting.** Before you begin shoveling your driveway, stretch your arms, back, and legs to prevent injury during snow removal. A five-minute stretch can prevent a weeklong backache.

- **Keep your hands 12 inches apart when holding the shovel to provide greater stability.** Ensuring a strong and comfortable grip will prevent straining during lifting and carrying.
- **Face toward the object you intend to lift—have your shoulder and hips squarely facing the object.** Properly positioning your body when attempting to lift the snow will help you to maintain balance on slick surfaces and prevent injury. Always keep the heaviest part of the shovel close to your body at your center of gravity.
- **Bend at the hips and push the chest out, then bend your knees and lift with your legs.** This proper lifting technique will protect your lower back while lifting the snow. A poor lifting technique will cause back and neck pain during snow removal.
- **Avoid twisting the back—instead, pivot your whole body.** Twisting your upper body, rather than pivoting your whole body, can lead to a strain in the back and an increased chance of falling due to being off balance.
- **Walk to the new location to deposit the snow, rather than reaching or tossing.** Lifting and tossing the snow, rather than walking it to the deposit location, can be dangerous, especially on slick surfaces. The effort of tossing the snow standing still can cause you to lose balance and fall.
- **Play it safe and ask a neighbor for help.** If you have a pre-existing heart condition or any other condition or disability that could increase the risk of injury or death, ask a neighbor or family member to remove the snow or ice for you.
- **Be a good neighbor.** If you have an elderly or disabled neighbor, volunteer to remove the snow or ice in their driveway and around their car, as well as their walkway or porch to prevent the chance of an injury.

Snow Blower Safety Tips

Using a snow blower can make snow removal quick and easy, but it can also be a dangerous way to remove snow if you've never used a snow blower before. Here are a few tips to safely use a snow blower:

- **If the blower jams, turn it off.** When snow is heavy and wet, it often clogs snow blowers. To safely unclog the blower, turn it off and wait for the blades to stop spinning, then use a broom handle or similar object to remove the packed snow.
- **Ensure proper supervision.** Never let a child or inexperienced person operate a snow blower without supervision. This could lead to severe injuries. Always make sure to educate people on proper snow blower use before allowing them to operate one.
- **Fuel it before turning it on.** This may sound like common sense, but injuries happen when people try to fill their snow blower's gas tank while it's on. If you need to refill during use, make sure to turn it off first.
- **Plan for where you'll move the snow.** Before you begin to use your snow blower, think about where the snow will end up. Go with the wind if you can to prevent snow blowing in your eyes, and make sure you're not blowing snow over surfaces you or a neighbor already cleaned.

Sometimes, no matter how safe you play it, injuries happen. If back sprains, cuts, ankle sprains, neck injuries, breathing problems, or ailments that are more serious occur, such as symptoms of a heart attack, you should call your doctor, visit an Immediate Care location, call 911, or go to the Emergency Department immediately.