

Safeguarding Against Snow Shovelling Injuries

Winter weather poses numerous dangers for those who must navigate it in their daily lives and work. Tasks such as driving in adverse conditions or clearing snow significantly increase the risk of injury. One particularly hazardous winter activity is shovelling snow.

Snow Shoveling Injuries

While shovelling snow may appear straightforward, it frequently results in injuries at work and home. A study published in the American Journal of Emergency Medicine analyzed 195,000 snow shoveling-related injuries treated in hospitals over 17 years (1990-2006).

Key findings include:

- Muscle overexertion, falls, and being hit by the shovel were the main causes of injury.
- Soft tissue injuries, particularly involving muscles, ligaments, and tendons, were the most common, with lower back injuries occurring frequently.
- Cuts and broken bones were also frequent, with the arms and hands most likely to suffer fractures.
- Although only 7% of injuries were heart-related, all fatalities resulting from snow shovelling were linked to heart conditions.
- Adults over 55 were more than four times as likely to experience heart-related symptoms while shovelling compared to younger individuals.

Best Practices to Prevent Snow Shoveling Injuries

Before shovelling, consider using mechanical options like a plow or snowblower. If shovelling is necessary, follow these safety tips:

1. Warm up or stretch before starting.
2. Avoid overexertion, take breaks if you're not accustomed to heavy physical work or have health concerns, and consider having someone else do the shovelling if necessary.
3. Maintain proper posture; avoid bending or twisting while lifting.
4. Lift using your legs instead of your back.
5. Push snow rather than lift it whenever possible, as this reduces the risk of injury.
6. Use an ergonomically designed snow shovel to ease the physical strain.
7. Wear appropriate footwear and be cautious of your footing to prevent slips and falls in icy conditions.

While shovelling snow may seem straightforward, it carries a significant risk of injury. Be aware of the potential risks and take precautions to ensure your safety while performing this winter task.