

# Shovel Snow Safely

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Welcome to winter in Wisconsin, in the last few days we have had it all, rain, sleet, snow, melting and freezing. This is a nasty recipe full of hazards related to slip, trip, fall, and injuries related to the removal of wet, heavy snow. Today, let's focus on how to shovel snow safely, these tips should be considered for the safety of buildings and ground crews, maintenance employees, custodial groups and your personal safety at home as well.

While snow shoveling may seem like a simple task, it's important to take it seriously and to consider snow shoveling safety as you prepare. You may not have considered taking precautions against cold stress, soft tissue injuries and cardiac stress, and these can lead to hypothermia, lower back pain after shoveling and even heart attacks.

In preparation for snow shoveling activities, dress in layers and in proper cold-weather gear such as insulated boots and wool socks to stay warm. This can help prevent injuries that can come from cold stress. Also, take precautions to protect your heart when choosing the best time to shovel:

- Avoid shoveling immediately after waking up, because blood is more prone to clotting earlier in the morning, wait at least 30 minutes and warm up first.
- Avoid shoveling after eating a big meal, because blood goes to your stomach and away from your heart.
- Avoid shoveling for 60 minutes after drinking coffee or smoking and avoid coffee and tobacco for 60 minutes after shoveling too. These stimulants can raise your heart rate and blood pressure, putting you more at risk.

The Editorial Staff at Grainger recently published a **"Top Ten"** list of tips for Snow Removal.

1. Keep snow from sticking to your shovel or the chute in your snow blower by spraying these surfaces with a silicone lubricant or cooking spray.
2. When shoveling, keep the shovel close to your body. This will help prevent overreaching with heavy loads and can help minimize back strain.
3. If heavy or blowing snow is expected, cover cars or walkways and other areas with tarps for easy snow removal the next day.
4. Switch out metal-edged shovels with plastic shovels for clearing uneven pavement and wood surfaces like porches and decks. Metal edges catch easily on uneven surfaces and can damage wood and concrete.
5. Keep shovels with a metal edge at least ½-inch above surfaces while shoveling.

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6. Rock salt can make cracks in concrete worse. Instead, choose nontoxic calcium magnesium acetate compounds to melt snow and ice on asphalt and concrete.
7. Shovel often. Don't wait for the storm to end to remove snow. Try to stay ahead of the accumulation to prevent unnecessary muscle strain and fatigue.
8. If you can't shovel during the storm, once the storm is over, remove snow by shoveling in layers. Take the top layer first and work your way down.
9. Flat, low-volume shovels help prevent picking up too much load for each lift.
10. Plan ahead. Make sure snow throwers are functioning properly and have adequate oil and gasoline if needed.

Safety is always a top priority for any cold-weather task. With a bit of awareness and solid preparation, we can reduce the likelihood of injury to both employees and ourselves. With the new year upon us, everyone can make a commitment to keep each other safe.

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