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Tips To Avoid The Snow Shovel Blues

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The winter months are here and the snow has started to fly. With the weather comes extra work around the yard. The most dreaded of chores of course, is shoveling the driveway. All that bending, lifting, and twisting. Torquing muscles that have been in hiding since this time last year.

Every year after the first major snowfall, my office becomes refuge for the many aching backs of snow shovelers. Here are a few tips that may prevent or ease the aches and pains the day after.

First of all, before starting to shovel the snow, warm up. Just like in any other physical activity, warming up muscles and getting blood flowing to the whole muscle can prevent injuries. The easiest way to warm up is by stretching and elevating your heart rate for a few minutes. Focusing on large muscle groups is the quickest way to do this. The legs – by doing some lunges or deep knee bends, the back – by doing some twists and bends, the chest and legs – with a few push ups.

Now that you're warmed up, don't overdress because sweating in the cold air can cause a chill as well as dehydrate you quickly. Wear layers that can be removed as the shoveling brings your body temperature up. Make sure to wear footwear with adequate grips on their soles. Slipping while straining to lift or push a shovel can be your spine's downfall.

Have some water on hand and make sure to stop for water breaks often. Have a large drink of water before reaching for that coffee or hot chocolate. Fluid is lost rapidly in cold weather from sweating and vapor in breath. This can only be replenished with water, as caffeinated or carbonated drinks act as diuretics and increase fluid loss. Dehydration can lead to fatigue and makes muscles and joints much more susceptible to pulls or strains.

When shoveling, be sure to lift with the legs while keeping the back straight. Push snow to the side and avoid throwing shovels full of snow whenever possible. Switch the way you hold the shovel so you are not twisting to the same side repetitively.

Take breaks often, but don't let the body cool down completely before returning to the job. Another option is to break the job in half and do some late in the day or the next day. When finished shoveling, again as with any physical activity or exercise, a cool down period can be very beneficial. Take the muscles through a cool down session of stretching to again increase blood flow to the entire muscle belly. This helps the body to remove any impurities or lactic acid that may have built up in the muscle fibers. Lactic acid is one of the major contributors to muscle soreness during the recovery period over the next few days following exertion. By following these few tips, a lot of grief may be avoided during the recovery period.

When it comes to cold weather work, being safe, using common sense and doing everything in moderation are great ways to avoid injury and still get your driveway clean. An even easier way to avoid the aches is to use the neighbor's snow blower but that's not nearly as good of a workout or as rewarding.

I would like to take this time to wish you a safe, healthy and happy holiday.