Proper Shoveling Techniques

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With the arrival of snowy weather, many people will be at risk for injuries from snow shoveling. Ranging from sprains and strains to significant back injuries, it’s important to think about safety and take precautions to prevent injury. Remember, even light fluffy snow can lead to a lasting back injury if shoveled improperly! If you prepare and use safe shoveling techniques, you can prevent hurting yourself.

PREPARATION

1. Assess your health: Do you suffer from cardiac issues? Are you not feeling well? Shoveling may seem like a chore, but it is a challenging physical activity. Consult with your physician if you’re unsure if it’s safe for you to shovel. If you’re not up for the exertion, don’t risk your health. Ask a neighbor or family member for help.

2. Assess the situation: Sometimes the safest technique is to shovel with a snow blower or plow. If you can’t, proceed to step three.

3. Stretch before and after you shovel: Just as you should stretch before running a race or lifting weights, it’s an important step in preventing injury.

4. Dress appropriately in layers for warmth, but be able to move well: You will need to be able to bend your knees without restriction.

SHOVELING TIPS

• Try to avoid excessive bending and twisting at the waist: By bending your knees and lifting with your legs, you can maintain the normal curves of your spine and prevent injury.

• Lift only what you can: Heavy, wet snow may require smaller shovel loads.

• Use good mechanics: You can protect your back by using your legs and abdominal muscles. Try to avoid twisting as much as possible when throwing snow.

• Take rest and stretch breaks. If you become overly sweaty, dizzy or short of breath, it’s important to stop and take a break. If you continue to feel ill, or suspect a serious medical problem, seek emergency help right away.

SHOVELING TECHNIQUES

• Shoveling/pushing snow: Push from the edge of the handle, shift body weight from back leg to front leg instead of bending at the waist. Keep your knees bent.

• Snow bank technique: Don’t try to save time by lifting too much! Insert shovel vertically into snow, step on blade and lift small amounts.

For more information about Elliot Rehabilitation Services, call 663-4128.