

# PHYSIO TIPS

## SNOW SHOVELLING

Winter is here bringing with it the beautiful white look for our city. Snow brings with it the holiday season, skating, hot chocolate... A winter wonderland! However, our driveways and pavements still need to be shovelled...

### Choose a shovel that's right for you:

- A shovel's handle is the appropriate length when you can slightly bend your knees, and hold the shovel comfortably in your hands at the start of the shovel stroke.
- A bent-handled shovel can reduce bending compared to a traditional straight-handled shovel.
- A shovel blade that is made of plastic will be lighter than a metal one, putting less strain on your spine.
- A smaller blade may be better than a larger one because it avoids temptation to pick up a pile of snow that is too heavy for your body to carry.

### Use proper shovelling techniques:

- Grip the shovel with your hands at least 12 inches apart, and keep one hand close to the base of the shovel.
- Positioning your hands further apart will help increase your leverage.
- Squat with your legs hip-width apart, knees bent and back straight.
- Lift with your legs. Do not bend at the waist.
- Scoop small amounts of snow into the shovel and walk to where you want to dump it. Holding a shovel of snow with your arms outstretched puts undue strain and compression on your spine.
- Step in the direction in which you are throwing the snow. This will help prevent twisting of the low back and 'next-day back fatigue' experienced by many shovelers.

### Take care of your body:

Research in the **Journal of Cardiopulmonary Rehabilitation** has identified snow shovelling as a high-risk activity for cardiovascular events.

- Clear heavy snow in two stages – by skimming snow from the top, then removing the bottom layer
- Take a short rest or decrease the intensity of effort slightly if you find yourself unable to say a long sentence in one breath.
- Take frequent breaks when shovelling – stand up straight and walk around periodically to bring your spine back to a neutral position. You can also do standing extension exercises by placing your hands in the small of your back, bending slightly backwards, holding the position for several seconds, and repeating this movement 5 to 10 times.

