

# SNOW CAN BE A PAIN - IN YOUR BACK OR NECK

## Tips for Safe Snow Shoveling

This winter, be prepared. If snow shoveling is on your “to do” list, avoid injury. According to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, the potential for musculoskeletal injury is great when snow shoveling is not done properly. *“Snow shoveling needs to be viewed as exercise, and like all exercise if it is not done correctly a person can injure themselves. In this case their back or neck,”* states Kevin Macadaeg, M.D., minimally invasive spine specialist with Indiana Spine Group.

Indiana Spine Group offers these tips when shoveling snow:

**Select your shovel with care** – choose a shovel with a curved handle and avoid a shovel too short or long. Additionally, place your hands shoulder width apart; i.e. 12” apart – not too close together.

**Stretch your muscles** – similar to a work out, stretch your muscles to warm them up before you begin to shovel. This will decrease your risk for muscle strain.

**Push the snow forward** – as you shovel, push the snow forward rather than lifting, when possible. Do not twist and throw the snow over your shoulder or to the side, this twisting motion can stress your back.

**Snow can be heavy** – it is estimated that one shovel of snow can weigh 20 – 25 pounds. If possible, shovel frequently to avoid heavily packed snow. Newly fallen snow is lighter.

**Use proper technique when lifting snow** – The recommendation from the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons is as follows, “Squat with your legs apart, knees bent and back straight. Lift with your legs. Do not bend at the waist. Scoop small amounts of snow onto the shovel and walk to where you want to dump it. Holding a shovelful of snow with your arms outstretched puts too much weight on your spine. Never remove deep snow all at once; do it piecemeal. Shovel an inch or two; then take another inch off. Rest, and repeat if necessary.”

**Don’t risk a fall** – if there is ice, be sure to place salt or sand over the area to help create foot traction to prevent slipping.

**Remember snow shoveling is exercise** – as with any exercise rest frequently, drink plenty of fluids. If you do not exercise regularly or you have a medical condition, check with your doctor first.

**This information is provided by physical therapy services at Indiana Spine Group. For more information about physical therapy services and Indiana Spine Group, please call (317) 228-7000 or visit [www.indianaspinegroup.com](http://www.indianaspinegroup.com).**

