



Snow Be Gone

The Washington D.C. area has had its share – and more – of snow this year. While most busy executives prepared ahead with snow removal contracts, there's still a lot to do around the house. Shoveling snow from sidewalks and cars, bringing in firewood and ensuring family members and pets stay warm and safe can be fun – but also add some additional strain and potential health dangers.

Aside from the obvious dangers of snow removal – such as not climbing a slippery roof to remove snow, watching for ice patches and keeping your hands away from a snow blower blade – most executives won't think twice about grabbing a shovel to clear what the plow doesn't.

But you may not be aware of the added strain snow shoveling can cause to your heart. One study determined that after only two minutes of shoveling, sedentary men's heart rates rose to levels higher than those normally recommended during aerobic exercise. In addition to the lifting and tossing, part of the additional strain is due to cold air which makes it harder to breathe.

All this stress to the system leads to an increase in the number of fatal heart attacks among snow shovelers after a substantial snowfall. In fact, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan analyzed hospital emergency room admissions following a blizzard, and found that the number of people showing up with cardiac-related conditions increased by 59 percent during the first 24 hours after the storm.

Yet if you are already in good shape, consider snow removal as your day's trip to the gym. You already know that you need about 30 minutes of moderate physical activity of some kind on most days of the week – and shoveling out the drive certainly counts. An older study from the Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health found that just 15 minutes of snow shoveling can bring up your heart rate and keep it elevated enough to count as moderate physical activity.

But don't forget your back when lifting and tossing all the wet, heavy snow. Even the fit executive can strain their back with improper shoveling. Just as you would at the gym – stretch out first.



While shoveling, keep good form by bracing your feet hip width apart for balance, bending from the knees (not the back) and keeping your core tight by pulling your belly button to your spine as you lift the snow. Don't twist when tossing - if you need to move the snow to one side reposition your feet and keep your form square.

As with any exercise, drink plenty of water and avoid stimulants such as caffeine, nicotine or alcohol which may increase your heart rate and cause your blood vessels to constrict and stress your heart.

The doctors at Executive MD are available to discuss any concerns you may have about your health and dealing with the snow. If you are inactive, have a history of heart trouble or back problems - hire a teen or call us first!

John Mamana, M.D.
Executive MD
John@ExecutiveMD.com
703-260-6455