

# Cardiologist explains why snow can be dangerous for those with heart disease

November 21 2014, by Ellen Goldbaum

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(Medical Xpress)—Cardiac deaths during this week's storm have occurred not just while people are shoveling but while they have been using snowblowers as well.

Both snow-removal methods have their risks, says Anne B. Curtis, MD, Charles and Mary Bauer Professor and Chair of the Department of Medicine in the University at Buffalo School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences and UB Distinguished Professor. She is one of the world's leading clinical cardiac electrophysiologists and an expert in [cardiac arrhythmias](#).

"Patients with [coronary heart disease](#) or heart failure should definitely not push themselves in this kind of weather," says Curtis, who sees patients at UBMD Internal Medicine, where she also is president and [chief executive officer](#). "The stress puts them at risk for a fatal heart rhythm problem, cardiac arrest.

"It's out-of-the-ordinary stress that gets people, whatever they are doing," she explains. "Many people are sedentary most of the time and not used to a lot of exertion. Shoveling is a lot of work and a risk for people with heart disease.

"A snow blower seems more benign, but then people are still out in the cold, may operate it for a longer period of time, and it still requires maneuvering it through a lot of snow," she explains.

This storm, in particular, where some areas are dealing with 4 and 5 feet of snow or more, is especially dangerous.

"Snowblowing probably wouldn't be an issue if someone was trying to remove 2-3 inches of snow from their driveway or sidewalk," says Curtis. "However, I've seen people pushing snow blowers through much higher piles of [snow](#) on TV. That is difficult to do, and a stress on the body."

Curtis plays a key role in developing national treatment guidelines for treating atrial fibrillation, a [heart rhythm disorder](#) that can cause fatigue, shortness of breath, exercise intolerance, and can even lead to [heart failure](#). Her clinical research has significantly advanced knowledge of human cardiac electrophysiology and heart-rhythm abnormalities.

Provided by University at Buffalo

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