

7 ways to keep the heart safe when shoveling snow

January 5 2018



Credit: American Heart Association

A winter storm advancing up the East Coast pummeled the Northeast on Thursday, bringing bitter cold, snow and strong winds. As people dig out there and elsewhere this winter, there are some health hazards to keep in mind.

The [physical exertion](#) of shoveling paired with the cold temperatures increases the heart's workload. For some people, walking through heavy or wet snow is enough to strain the heart.

Here are tips for keeping the heart safe when shoveling snow:

- Give yourself a break. Take frequent breaks to avoid overstressing your heart. Pay attention to how your body feels during those breaks.
- Don't eat a big meal before or soon after shoveling. Eating a large meal can put an extra load on your heart.
- Use a small shovel or a snow thrower. The act of lifting [heavy snow](#) can raise blood pressure during the lift. It is safer to lift smaller amounts. When possible, simply push the [snow](#).
- Learn the [heart attack](#) warning signs and listen to your body. Even if you're not sure it's a heart attack, have it checked out. Carry your cellphone in your pocket and call 911 immediately if you experience any signs of a heart attack.
- Do not drink alcohol before or immediately after shoveling. Alcohol can increase a person's sensation of warmth and may cause you to underestimate the extra strain your body is under in the cold.
- Consult a doctor ahead of time. Before you start shoveling, talk with your doctor if you have a medical condition, do not exercise regularly or are middle-aged or older.
- Be aware of the dangers of hypothermia. Heart failure causes most deaths in hypothermia. To prevent hypothermia, dress in layers of warm clothing, which traps air between layers forming a protective insulation. Wear a hat because much of the body's heat can be lost through the head.

Provided by American Heart Association

Citation: 7 ways to keep the heart safe when shoveling snow (2018, January 5) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-01-ways-heart-safe-shoveling.html>

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