

Snow shoveling, slips on ice bring cold weather dangers

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Clearing away snow can be hazardous to your health, experts warn.

Shoveling snow causes 100 deaths a year in the United States, and injuries due to improper use of snowblowers are common.

"Cold weather will cause the body to constrict [blood vessels](#) to maintain warmth, which can then raise [blood pressure](#) and the risk for [heart attack](#)," said Dr. Chad Zack, a cardiologist at Penn State Heart and Vascular Institute in Hershey, Pa.

If you have heart or lung issues or are elderly and have underlying [health conditions](#), you should avoid shoveling if possible and ask a friend to help or hire someone to do it, he advised. If you do decide to do it yourself, shovel safely.

"Shovel only what you need to shovel," Zack said in a Penn State news release. "Shovel the walk if you're facing a fine if you don't, but don't shovel the driveway if you don't need to go out. Shovel small amounts of snow rather than heavy loads at once, and take frequent breaks."

An ergonomic shovel can be easier on the back and the heart. It's also crucial to keep hydrated to replace fluids lost by sweating.

"Pay attention to the classic signs of a heart attack—[chest pain](#); [shortness of breath](#); pain that radiates to the jaw, arm or back; nausea or cold sweats—and stop if you experience any of them," Zack said. "If they persist, call 911."

If you use a snowblower and it jams, don't just reach in to clear the obstruction. Most snowblowers use a spring to spin the auger that pushes the snow, explained Dr. Jeff Lubin, an emergency medicine physician at Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center in Hershey.

"People don't realize the force of the spring inside the snowblower. If it gets jammed with snow and they reach in to get the snow out, they can

end up with pretty severe hand injuries," he said in the release.

Even if the machine is turned off, the spring can release and injure you, Lubin warned.

"Keep your hands away from any moving parts," he said. "Use something other than your hand to release the jam."

When outdoors in the winter, dressing in layers will keep you warmer.

Remember, too, that it is important to warm up before shoveling or doing other activities. Cold muscles are more likely to be injured, Lubin said.

More information: The National Safety Council offers more [winter safety tips](#).

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