

Shoveling snow? Beware of heart hazards

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(HealthDay)—Don't let a picture-perfect snowfall turn deadly. Shoveling snow can cause heart attacks or sudden cardiac arrest in folks with heart conditions and even in those who are unaware that they have heart

disease, the [American Heart Association \(AHA\)](#) warns.

"Shoveling snow is a very strenuous activity, made even more so by the impact that cold temperatures have on your body, increasing the [blood pressure](#) while simultaneously constricting the coronary arteries. It really is a 'perfect storm' for acute cardiac events," Barry Franklin said in an AHA news release. He is the lead author of an AHA scientific statement on exercise-related heart risks.

"Among the many findings of our research, we saw that the cardiac demands of heavy snow shoveling, including marked increases in the heart rate and [systolic blood pressure](#), could equal and exceed the upper levels achieved during maximal treadmill testing in sedentary men," said Franklin, a professor of internal medicine at Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine in Royal Oak, Mich.

Researchers in one study found that after just two minutes of shoveling snow, participants' heart rates topped the upper limit often prescribed for aerobic exercise testing.

"The least fit subjects demonstrated the highest heart rates during shoveling," Franklin said.

Numerous studies have flagged the [dangers of shoveling snow](#), and the activity was included in AHA's 2020 updated scientific statement on exercise-related acute heart events.

Franklin, a leading expert on the science behind the heart risks of snow shoveling, said hundreds of people in the United States die during or just after snow removal every year.

"The impact of snow removal is especially concerning for people who already have cardiovascular risks like a sedentary lifestyle or obesity,

being a current or former smoker, having diabetes, high cholesterol or high blood pressure, as well as people who have had a [heart attack](#) or stroke," he said. "People with these characteristics and those who have had bypass surgery or coronary angioplasty simply should not be shoveling snow."

To stay safer while working with snow, be aware of [the dangers](#), be prepared and take it easy, Franklin suggested. Take short breaks as you work.

And, beware: Even using an automatic snow blower can be dangerous for some, because the exertion needed to push it can raise [heart rate](#) and blood pressure quickly, Franklin said. For folks who consider themselves healthy, though, snow blowers can reduce demands on the heart.

Pushing snow with a shovel is preferred over lifting and throwing it.

If you experience chest pain or pressure, lightheadedness, heart palpitations or irregular heart rhythms, stop clearing snow immediately. Call 911 if symptoms don't subside quickly.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [heart health and the environment](#).

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