

# Shoveling snow not without hazards, health risks

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As winter's peak approaches, we can expect snowfall to tick up around Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and the Miami Valley region. It can come in waves and often in large amounts.

Here are a few tips for those who don't have much snow-shoveling experience and some reminders for you old pros.

## What the experts say

Snow shoveling is considered a moderate physical activity. The bad news? Researchers have reported an increase in the number of fatal heart attacks among shovelers after [heavy snowfall](#).

This rise may be due to the sudden demand shoveling places on an individual's heart. It can cause a quick increase in [heart rate](#) and [blood pressure](#). 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.

The cold must also be taken into account. Cold air makes it harder to work and breathe, which adds extra strain on the body.

## Who's at risk?

Are you at risk? Studies show people in the following demographics are more at risk for heart attacks after shoveling snow:

- Anyone who has already had a heart attack
- Individuals with a history of heart disease
- Those with [high blood pressure](#) or cholesterol levels
- Smokers
- Individuals leading a [sedentary lifestyle](#)

## How you can stay safe

Here are a few things to keep in mind during this winter's snow-

shoveling season:

- If you are inactive and have a history of heart trouble, talk to your doctor before taking on the task.
- Avoid caffeine or nicotine before shoveling snow. These are stimulants, which may increase your heart rate and cause blood vessels to constrict. This places extra stress on the heart.
- Drink plenty of water. Dehydration is just as big an issue in cold-winter months as the summer.
- Dress in several layers so you can remove as needed.
- Warm up your muscles before shoveling by walking for a few minutes or marching in place. Stretch your arms and legs, because warm muscles will work more efficiently and be less prone to injury.
- Pick the right shovel. A smaller blade will require you to lift less snow, reducing strain on your body.
- Begin shoveling slowly to avoid placing a sudden demand on your heart.
- Pace yourself and take breaks as needed.
- Protect your back from injury by lifting correctly. Stand with your feet about hip-width for balance and keep the shovel close to your body. Bend from the knees (not the back) and tighten your stomach muscles as you lift the snow.
- Avoid twisting movements. If you need to move the snow to one side, adjust your foot position to face the direction the [snow](#) will be going.
- Most importantly—listen to your body. Stop if you feel pain.

Provided by Air Force Office of Scientific Research

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