

Shoveling snow can be strenuous, take it easy

Most of us don't equate climbing seven flights of stairs with shoveling snow. Yet lifting 10 shovelfuls of wet snow in one minute's time is comparable to climbing seven flights of stairs.

"You can expend a tremendous amount of energy when shoveling snow," says Doctor Shurney, M.D., vice president and corporate medical director for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Michigan. "If you are not cautious, shoveling snow can be dangerous to your health and lead to a heart attack."

The wet stuff we've already seen in parts of Michigan and Ohio is particularly dangerous. A shovelful of wet snow can weigh as much as 20 pounds and lifting it can put a strain on your heart.

Even lightning the load may not help. If the shovel and snow

weigh only nine pounds, lifting ten shovelfuls in one minute is the same as climbing three flights of stairs.

"Imagine the strain put on your heart when clearing something as large as a driveway," Shurney said.

He offers this advice to lessen the risk of heart attack: "Don't shovel snow if you know your blood pressure is high or if you have heart disease."

"If you are not in top physical condition, take it very slow and easy. Load the shovel only half full, or even less if the snow is wet, and move only a few shovels in a minute's time. Rest often."

"Use a snowblower or shovels designed to push the snow to keep yourself from bending and lifting. It doesn't take much to

•If you are not in top physical condition, take it very slow and easy. Load the shovel only half full, or even less if the snow is wet, and move only a few shovels in a minute's time. Rest often. •Use a snowblower or shovels designed to push the snow to keep yourself from bending and lifting. It doesn't take much to strain your back when shoveling snow.

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•Wearing a hat can be both fashionable and practical. Thirty percent of body heat is lost through the head. Low temperatures can cause a rise in blood pressure in some persons and can also cause a spasm of the coronary arteries.

•Move your legs frequently to help pump blood through the veins. If you don't move your legs frequently while shoveling, blood may pool in the legs.

•Watch your breathing. It is a natural inclination to hold your breath as you lift a heavy shovel of snow. Since this decreases the return of blood to the heart, it

can cause cardiac irregularities. •Avoid the use of alcohol, cigarettes and coffee before shoveling snow. These substances dilate blood vessels and that means you won't be able to retain the body heat you need when in the cold.

•It's unwise to shovel snow

soon after a large meal. Blood is being diverted to help the body digest the food and less blood is available to circulate to the fingers and toes.

Even if you're in good physical condition because of jogging or bicycling, you are not immune from heart attacks.

"These activities may not be strengthening the arm muscles to the same degree as leg muscles," Shurney said. "Since shoveling snow involves the arms, the heart has to work harder to pump blood because circulation in the arms is usually less efficient."

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