

Let It Snow...Let It Snow

Do you realize how much stress shoveling snow places on your back?

The Problem

Snow shoveling can place excessive stress on spinal structures. This is a common cause of lower back strains and vertebral disc damage. In a study published by Dr. Brad Coffiner, the author noted "...when handling heavy snow with a shovel, the L5/S1 disc (i.e. the low back) has been identified as the weakest link in the body segment chain. The most severe injuries and pain are likely to occur in this low back region."

Tips for Safe Snow Shoveling

- If you experience pain of any kind, stop immediately and seek assistance.
- Choose a snow shovel that is right for you! A curved handle is ideal, as it enables you to keep your back straighter when shoveling. The appropriate length should allow you to have a slight bend in your knees, flex your back 10 degrees or less, and hold the shovel comfortably in your hands at the start of the "stroke". A plastic shovel blade will generally be lighter than a metal one, putting less strain on your spine. Sometimes, a smaller blade is better than a larger blade. A smaller blade can be better as it avoids the risk of trying to pick up too much snow.
- Push the snow, do not lift it.
- Warm up your muscles before you start. Cold, tight muscles are more likely to sprain or strain.
- Grip the shovel at least 12 inches apart. By creating distance between your hands, you increase your leverage and reduce strain on your body.
- Technique is important! The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons recommends: "If you must lift the snow, lift it properly, squat with your legs apart, knees bent and back straight. Lift with your legs. Do not bend at the waist. Scoop small



amounts of snow into the shovel and walk to where you want to dump it. Holding a shovel of snow with your arms outstretched puts too much weight on your spine. Never remove deep snow all at once; do it piecemeal. Shovel an inch or two; then take another inch off. Rest and repeat if necessary." In addition to these comments remember to move your feet rather than twisting.

- Never throw snow over your shoulder.
- Remember wet snow can be very heavy. One full shovel load can weigh as much as 25 pounds.
- Pace yourself by taking frequent breaks to gently stretch your back, arms and legs.
- Consider buying a snow-blower. When used correctly, a snow-blower will put far less strain on your back than snow shoveling.

By following these tips, you are less likely to be injured while shoveling snow. Finally, for those who are able bodied, it is always worth remembering neighbors on your block who might not be able to remove the snow from their sidewalks. A few minutes of help can make the world of difference to the well being of a less able bodied person as well as make you a good neighbor!

Meet Our Staff

Melissa came to APTR as an Exercise Specialist in November 2007 from another medical field. She enjoys cooking, theatre and playing tug with her dog. She relaxes by meditating and doing yoga.

Ashleigh came to APTR as an Exercise Specialist in December 2007. She graduated from CNU in May and was married just two months later. Currently she is a graduate student at George Mason with a study in International Health. She enjoys reading and spending time outside.

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Restoring Movement Together!

Meet Our Staff Cont...

Our newest Physical Therapist is Lekha who joined the APTR team in January. Lekha received her Physical Therapy degree from in 1999. Her clinical experience includes treating low back pain and SI dysfunction, out patient orthopedics, shoulder dysfunction and geriatric rehabilitation. Her hobbies include reading and listening to music.

Trivia!

Have you been keeping up with our newsletters? Why should you? There is lots of great information and you can win great gift cards! This month we are asking a trivia question. The first three people who call Christy with the right answer will win a \$10 gift certificate to Starbucks. Here's your question: What placed trophy was earned by Lisa in the 3rd Annual 5 Alarm Nokesville Fire & Rescue Department golf tournament? (Clue: It was in last quarter's newsletter.) Good Luck!

Contest Time!!

Between February 1 and 29, 2008 the first two clients who refer the most patients to us will win a \$50 certificate to *Bonefish*. Our largest referral source is from friends and family. We appreciate your business and trust.



Advantage Physical Therapy
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We're on the Web!

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