

Treating Snow Shoveling Injuries: Ice or Heat?

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The average person might shovel 750 to 1,500 pounds of snow on a typical driveway in a day with just 3 – 6 inches of wet snow! So, it's not surprising that shoveling snow leads to more than 11,500 hospital treatments every year related to snow shoveling, according to the American Journal of Emergency Medicine. The injuries are of various kinds, and the total number cited does not include the thousands of more minor injuries that are not reported. So, what should you do when you experience [pain from shoveling snow](#)?

Common Types of Pain From Shoveling Snow

Some snow shoveling mal-effects are much more severe than others, requiring emergency medical treatment. Other effects from snow shoveling, such as these below, can often be managed at home:

Muscle Soreness

Many people experience [muscle aches](#), tightness, or soreness after shoveling snow. These effects are especially likely for the millions of people whose usual daily routines consist of mostly sedentary activities during winter. If you only occasionally do strenuous work like shoveling heavy snow, you can naturally be expected to experience some muscle soreness from such activity.

Recommended Remedy: To treat aches and pains from snow shoveling, doctors suggest using ice frequently throughout the first 2 to 3 days. Then, switch that regimen to applying heat frequently over the following several days. The ice can help reduce inflammation and bruising. Applying heat can increase the inflammation that causes acute soreness if it is used too soon.

Lower Back Pain

In a 16-year study of medical emergencies from snow shoveling, 34.3% were lower back injuries. Of those lower back cases, the majority of injuries (53.9%) were due to acute musculoskeletal exertion, 20.0% to slip and fall accidents during shoveling, and 15% were from being struck by a snow shovel. Of course, this study does not account for the many thousands of other snow shoveling injuries that occur every year but do not result in emergency room visits.

Recommended Remedy: If you experience mild low back pain from shoveling snow, apply the ice pack in 15-minute intervals. For lower back pain that continues longer than 48 hours after snow shoveling, see the expert recommendations from the Cleveland Clinic for non-invasive treatment. The options suggested include chiropractic care, and/or deep tissue massage, and/or physical therapy stretches and exercises.

If you have sustained a back injury, you should seek medical attention promptly. Or, if you have incurred common back pain from shoveling and the pain persists after non-invasive treatment, it is recommended that you see your physician to discuss potential remedies and options to relieve back pain.

What If The Pain Does Not Go Away?

If pain from muscle soreness persists longer than 72 hours, applying heat, especially wet heat, can help increase blood flow in the affected area and relax the tightness in muscles. Frequently use a heating pad or hot towel for approximately 20 to 40 minutes each time. This can help increase the flow of blood in the affected muscles and help clear away blood clotted in that impacted area to help you recover and use your full range of motion without pain again.

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