

HEARTS & BACKS

BEAR THE BRUNT OF SNOW SHOVELING

bright ideas for
Healthy Living

It's a scene we are all familiar with in New England: you wake in the morning to a light blanket of freshly fallen snow. But that blanket is not always as light as you think.

"If you haven't already, it's a good idea to familiarize yourself on how to protect your heart while removing that often beautiful, but heavy white stuff," says Dr. John Santoro, vice chairman, Emergency Medicine, Baystate Medical Center.

"People who have coronary artery disease and other illnesses should avoid exposure to cold weather, especially when shoveling," says Santoro. "If you do experience the symptoms of a heart attack, call 911 immediately."

Unusual exertion from shoveling snow can also cause severe back pain for those with healthy and bad backs, according to Dr. Julio Martinez-Silvestrini, staff physiatrist from Baystate Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation.

"Shoveling snow is a strenuous physical activity. Besides placing strain on the heart, there is also a lot of physical stress to the back, hips and knees," says Martinez-Silvestrini.

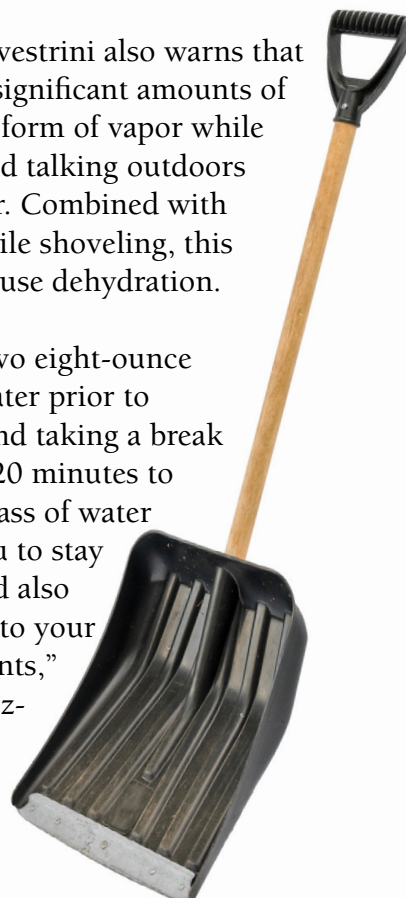
He notes that a standard shovel full of snow weighs about 16 pounds. Shoveling 10 times every minute for ten minutes alone is equivalent to lifting about 1,600 pounds after 10 minutes of shoveling.

Martinez-Silvestrini offers the following tips to reduce your risk of injury:

- When possible, try to shovel the snow while it is still falling. The snow may be less compact and easier to move.
- Shovel small amounts more frequently rather than waiting for all the snow to fall. It's easier to shovel two inches of snow than six inches or more.
- Pick up small amounts of snow, bend your knees and use your legs, not your back, to lift the snow.
- Throw the snow forward and avoid twisting at the waist. Step forward when throwing the snow, just like throwing a ball.
- If possible, push the snow away, don't lift it.

Martinez-Silvestrini also warns that people lose significant amounts of water in the form of vapor while breathing and talking outdoors in the winter. Combined with sweating while shoveling, this can easily cause dehydration.

"Drinking two eight-ounce glasses of water prior to shoveling, and taking a break every 15 to 20 minutes to drink one glass of water will help you to stay hydrated and also provide rest to your back and joints," says Martinez-Silvestrini.



SYMPTOMS OF A HEART ATTACK

Dr. J. Mark Peterman, director of the Baystate Regional Heart Attack Program, lists these common symptoms of a heart attack:

- **Pressure or pain in the chest, arms or neck**
- **Nausea**
- **Lightheadedness**
- **Sweating or feeling clammy**
- **Unusual fatigue**

If you think you may be having a heart attack, call 911 immediately.



Dr. John Santoro



Dr. Julio Martinez-Silvestrini