

The Joys of Shoveling Snow

Preparing for Battle Against Mother Nature

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As I prepare to dig my car out for what feels like the nine billionth time, I'm reminded of the influx of snow related injuries that I've seen and read about lately.

The main cause for these injuries isn't merely slips and falls, as you're likely to think. Instead, many of these injuries are pulled backs, herniated discs, hyperextended shoulders and many other forms of muscular trauma. Alongside those injuries are a bevy of cardiac issues related to the strain of simply shoveling out one's home.

Even if you never set foot inside of a gym, many every day tasks and household chores utilize the same cardiovascular and muscular involvement as even your toughest of workouts!

So, it's just as important to

adequately prepare your body for these situations as it would be for you to prepare for a body pump or spin class.

With that said, here's how you should approach your next battle with Mother Nature to avoid adding to the ever-growing line of snow related injuries flooding hospitals and physical rehabilitation centers lately.

Warm up:

I'm not just talking about clothing here, I'm also talking about preparing your muscles for physical activity. Instead of simply rushing outside, walk around the house for a bit, shake out your limbs or even do a few squats first (seriously!) to increase your blood flow and raise the muscle temperature in your arms and legs. Think about it, on a snowy day would you just start your car and peel off without warming it up first? If not, then why would you do that to your body?

Drink lots of water:

This is something that nearly everyone forgets in the winter. Just because it's cold outside does not mean that your body still doesn't need to remain hydrated, especially if you're performing grueling work such as shoveling large mounds of snow!

(Water is extremely important for preventing cramping. It's also the main ingredient in synovial fluid which is the fluid that lubricates your joints so you'll want to stay hydrated if you want to stay injury free.)

Watch your form and technique:

Aside from an extremely short list of specific exercises, you should never bend at the waist to pick up a heavy object including snow

on the end of a shovel. Instead, you'll want to protect your lower back by bending at the knees.

Be sure to keep your core tight (imagine tightening your stomach as though you were bracing for a punch) and exhale as you lift the loaded shovel into the air.

Make sure to occasionally switch your grip and stance to ensure that both sides of your body are providing equal effort. This is extremely important since you'll want an equal distribution of stress through the working muscles on both sides of your body. Try moving the pile of snow 5 times using your right arm and then switch to move the pile 5 times using your left arm. It may feel awkward at first but not as awkward as it would be to have to order shirts with one large right sleeve and a medium left!

Follow up your shoveling with another stretching session and a quality meal:

As previously stated, shoveling snow is a tough workout so you might as well benefit from it right? With that said, to help repair muscles and continue to ease soreness, you'll want to "recover" from your shoveling with a quality meal.

Recent studies have shown that for optimum recovery, a high quality protein shake within 30 minutes of exercising, followed by a balanced meal containing whole-foods within 90 minutes is ideal.

While this article focuses solely on dealing with snow, many other common chores such as raking leaves, landscaping and various household repairs could also be considered a workout. These activities can be a strain on your heart as well as your muscles.

Remember, the entire world is essentially one giant gymnasium so even though you may not see a treadmill or dumbbells, you'll still need to care for your body in the same way.

We may not ever be able to truly defeat Mother Nature but if we can remember to apply these basic principles to all of our outdoor activities, we may be able to at least hang in there for a few more rounds.

Darrell W. Butler has trained, managed and consulted for fitness centers and media outlets around the world. When he's not training a client or sharing his words of wisdom, you can catch him drinking a PFC Berries A'More Recovery Shake at his local gym's juice bar! For more information visit the Darrell Butler Personal Training website at www.dbptonline.com

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