

## **Shoveling Your Way to Lower Back Pain**

The lower back is one of the hardest working areas in your body. Do you realize that you use your lower back for basically every activity, from sitting at your desk at work, to driving a car, to even holding a cup of water? As the colder weather rolls in, beware of lower back injury and strain caused by the improper execution of a common cold weather activity – shoveling snow. According to Joel Feder, D.O., a osteopathic family physician from Overland Park, Kansas, by making some simple changes when shoveling, you can significantly lessen or even do away with lower back pain this winter.

Below are Dr. Feder's six tips for protecting your lower back while shoveling:

- 1. Warm up and stretch:** Before performing any activity, you need to prepare your body for what it's about to do. Do lunges and jumping jacks to get your blood flowing to your muscles and be sure to stretch your legs, arms and back before going out into the cold. A poorly prepared muscle often results in muscle tears and soreness.
- 2. Use your legs:** While shoveling heavy snow, favor your strongest muscle group in the body – your legs. Set your legs apart to create a solid base and bend through your legs and hips when picking up the snow.
- 3. Don't twist and toss:** When placing the snow in another spot, don't twist your torso and make your back do all the work. Instead, move your entire body so that your shoulders and hips are facing the spot before placing the snow. If shoveling light snow, it is best to push rather than lift.
- 4. Pick up smaller portions of snow:** Use a shovel with a smaller blade or consciously make an effort to pick up less snow. The activity may take longer, but you will have saved your lower back a great deal of strain.

**5. Put some space between your hands:** By doing this, you give yourself more leverage and make it easier to lift snow.

**6. Take Breaks:** When doing repetitive activities, rest every 15 minutes to give your muscles a chance to recover. Drink some water and do some more stretching.

If, regardless of your best efforts, you still end up with lower back pain, Dr. Feder suggests visiting an osteopathic physician. Osteopathic physicians, or D.O.s, are licensed physicians who have added training in osteopathic manipulative treatment (OMT), which is a hands-on technique that involves stretching, gentle pressure and resistance. OMT is effective in treating muscle pain, especially lower back pain, but can also help patients with a number of other health problems, such as:

- asthma
- sinus disorder
- carpal tunnel syndrome
- migraines
- menstrual pain

With a little preparation and know-how, you can save yourself from a winter of low back pain.

Preventive medicine is just one aspect of care osteopathic physicians (D.O.s) provide. Osteopathic physicians are fully licensed to prescribe medicine and practice in all specialty areas including surgery. D.O.s are trained to consider the health of the whole person and use their hands to help diagnose and treat their patients.