MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF
LABOR STANDARDS

# Prevent Heart Attacks When Shoveling Snow



## Warm up with Stretching First:

- Going directly from resting to lifting heavy snow puts strain on your heart.
- Do warm-up exercises as if you were going to play basketball.
- Do dynamic stretching like marching in place and jumping jacks to move your hands above your head.

## Keep your body warm:

- Cold weather constricts your blood vessels, which causes an increase in your blood pressure and increases risk of clotting.[1]
- Cold weather shunts blood from your arms to your torso.[1]
- Take indoor breaks to keep warm and drink fluids. Especially when temperatures are considered extremely cold for your location.

## Shoveling Techniques:

- Push snow when possible. Use a snowblower when possible.[1]
- Avoid lifting snow above your chest.[1]
- Avoid holding your breath when lifting. Holding your breath will increase your blood pressure.[1] Train yourself to breathe out at the moment you lift the shovel.
- Take breaks to walk or march in place without lifting snow to move the blood in your legs back to your heart.[1] Consider compression socks to maintain blood flow.
- Take warm breaks indoors and pace yourself.

## Action for Employers:

- Check in frequently with workers assigned to snow removal.
- Encourage indoor breaks for workers to warm up.
- Provide snow blowers and wheeled salt spreaders to reduce lifting.
- Train employees about cold stress, lifting, and symptoms of heart attacks.

## First Aid and Medical Help:

Call 911 if you have symptoms of heart attack.[1] Not all symptoms will occur for everyone.

- Discomfort in center of chest that lasts more than a few minutes or goes away and comes back.
- Discomfort in one or both arms, back, neck, jaw, or stomach.
- Your heart starts racing.
- Shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort.
- Cold sweat, nausea, and dizziness.

## References:


[1] American Heart Association "*Snow shoveling, cold temperatures combine for perfect storm of heart health hazards.*" (January 11, 2024) https://newsroom.heart.org/news/snow-shoveling-cold-temperatures-combine-for-perfect-storm-of-heart-health-hazards