

Cold Weather Exercise

Exercising in Cold Weather

For many of you, outdoor activities are part of your exercise program and may be essential to maintain a consistent home program. With the right precautions, exercising outdoors can continue all winter long, quite safely and enjoyably.

Cold weather places an added stress onto the cardiovascular system. The body attempts to prevent heat loss by constricting the blood vessels in the skin and shunting the warm blood back to the vital organs. This narrowing increases blood pressure and may cause angina in individuals with narrowed coronary arteries. Cold-induced angina may also occur if cold air is breathed in through the mouth.

Winter winds add to the challenge of outdoor exercise as they provide increased resistance on your body when you walk and may increase levels of fatigue.

Tips for Safe Shoveling

- **Consult a doctor.** If you have known heart or blood vessel disease (including stroke) previous heart surgery, and uncontrolled high blood pressure, you should check with your doctor before shoveling snow. If you have any other medical condition, or don't exercise on a regular basis, or are middle aged or older, schedule a meeting with your doctor prior to the first anticipated snowfall.
- **Warm-up first.** Take the time to do warm-up exercises to get your body accustomed to the vigorous exercise in the cold.
- **Give yourself a break.** Take frequent rest breaks during shoveling so you don't overstress your heart. Pay attention to how your body feels during those breaks.
- **Get help** from family/friends or neighbours, if possible.
- **Avoid eating a heavy meal prior to shoveling.** Eating a large meal can put an extra load on your heart.
- **Don't drink alcoholic beverages before shoveling.** Alcohol may increase a person's sensation of warmth and may cause them to underestimate the extra strain their body is under in the cold.
- **Be aware of the dangers of hypothermia.** Heart failure causes most deaths in hypothermia. To prevent hypothermia, dress in layers of warm clothing, which traps air between layers forming a protective insulation. Wear a hat because much of your body's heat can be lost through your head.
- **Use a small shovel.** The act of lifting heavy snow can raise blood pressure acutely during the lift. It is safer to lift smaller amounts more times, than to lug a few huge shovelfuls of snow.

Tips for Safe Winter Exercise

- **Wear 2 to 4 layers of light clothing of varying weaves.** This will build insulating layers of air and help to pull moisture away from the body. Avoid tightly woven cottons against the skin. Wool and many of the man-made fibers are a better choice.
- **Cover your mouth with a scarf.** If breathing cold air is a problem for you, the scarf acts as a barrier to warm the air.
- **Wear a hat** to prevent the considerable amount of body heat lost through the head.
- **Running shoes with a waffle sole and flared heels** provide extra stability on the snow and ice.
- **Pay attention to the wind chill effect.** If temperatures are less than -10 C or 15 F, outdoor exercise may not be advised.

Listen to your body. If you ever experience warning signs of a heart attack, stop what you're doing immediately and call 911!