

Winter Safety Tips

Winter recreational activities and chores can pose problems for the outdoor enthusiast whose body is not in condition. Winter sports like skating, skiing, and sledding can cause painful muscle spasms, strains, or tears if one's not in shape. Even shoveling snow the wrong way, climbing awkwardly over snow banks, slipping on sidewalks, and wearing the wrong kinds of clothing can all pose the potential for spasms, strains, and sprains.

Simply walking outside in the freezing weather without layers of warm clothing can intensify older joint problems and cause a great deal of pain. As muscles and blood vessels contract to conserve the body's heat, the blood supply to extremities is reduced. This lowers the functional capacity of many muscles, particularly among the physically unfit. Preparation for an outdoor winter activity, including conditioning the most vulnerable areas of the body, can help avoid injury and costly healthcare bills.

Warming up is essential. When pressed for time, it's better to shorten the workout length and keep a good warm-up than to skip the warm-up and dive right into the workout. Skipping the warm-up is the best way to get injured.

Start with light aerobic activity (jogging, biking, fast walking) for 7-10 minutes. Then follow these tips:

Skiing—Do 10 to 15 squats. Stand with your legs shoulder width apart, knees aligned over your feet. Slowly lower your buttocks as you bend your knees over your feet. Stand up straight again.

Skating—Do several lunges. Take a moderately advanced step with one foot. Let your back knee come down to the floor while keeping your shoulders in position over your hips. Repeat the process with your other foot.

Sledding—Do knee-to-chest stretches to fight compression injuries caused by repetitive bouncing over the snow. Either sitting or lying on your back, pull your knees to your chest and hold for up to 30 seconds.

Don't forget cool-down stretching after all of these sports.

Shoveling snow can also wreak havoc on the musculoskeletal system. I suggest the following tips for snow shoveling:

- Be careful. Listen to weather forecasts and rise early to have time to shovel before work.
- Layer clothing to keep your muscles warm and flexible.
- Shoveling can strain "de-conditioned" muscles between your shoulders, in your upper back, lower back, buttocks, and legs. Do some warm-up stretching before you grab that shovel.
- When you shovel, push the snow straight ahead. Don't try to throw it; walk it to the snow bank. Avoid sudden twisting and turning motions.
- Bend your knees to lift when shoveling. Let your leg and arm muscles do the work, not your back.
- Take frequent rest breaks to take the strain off your muscles. A fatigued body is more prone to injury.
- Stop immediately if you feel chest pain, get really tired, or have shortness of breath. You may need urgent professional help.

After any of these activities, if you are sore, apply an ice bag to the affected area for 20 minutes, then take it off for a couple of hours. Repeat a couple of times each day over the next day or two. If you continue to feel pain after following these tips, it may be time to visit a qualified chiropractor.

Information provided by Christopher M. Renze, D.C., D.I.B.C.N., of Renze Chiropractic Clinic, P.C. For more information, visit www.renzechiro.com or call the office at 965-3844.