

**For Immediate Release**

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**AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION OFFERS TIPS FOR SAFER SNOW SHOVELING**

*Studies show a link between shoveling snow and heart attack*

With Indiana's first major snow storm well underway in parts of the state, the American Heart Association warns that for some people shoveling snow can lead to a fatal heart attack. So, think twice before offering to shovel the driveway.

For most people, shoveling snow may not lead to any health problems. However, the risk of a heart attack during snow shoveling increases for those who are middle-aged or older, people who lead a sedentary lifestyle and people who have been diagnosed with a heart condition. The American Heart Association encourages these people to be extra careful when shoveling snow. One of the reasons heart attacks can occur during snow shoveling is the combination of colder temperatures and physical exertion. Cold weather places an additional strain on the heart when the body is working to keep warm. As people get older, they become less sensitive to the cold and may be less aware of the stress their hearts are under. The combination of sudden physical effort and cold weather increases the workload for the heart. As a result, too much strain on the heart during these conditions can cause a heart attack.

The American Heart Association advises that if you haven't been physically active, you should be extremely cautious when lifting a heavy shovel piled high with snow. The combination of sudden physical exertion and the cold increases the heart's workload. It's natural for blood vessels to temporarily narrow in cold weather. The cold can even be more dangerous if vessels are already narrowed due to fatty deposits. Too much strain on the heart during these conditions can result in a heart attack or even sudden cardiac arrest.

Research studies have shown a link between snow shoveling and heart attack. One study estimated that as many as 1,200 people nationwide die annually of coronary artery disease during and after major snowstorms. Another study, which was conducted in Beaumont, Michigan, showed a dramatic rise in heart attacks during and after major snowstorms. The researchers reviewed medical examiner records in three counties in the Detroit area and found that in the weeks prior to a snowstorm, there was only one fatal heart attack related to snow shoveling. In the weeks during the snowstorms, the number of fatal heart attacks climbed to 22. In the weeks after the snowstorm, there were 13 fatal heart attacks.

(more)

Snow shoveling/2

The American Heart Association offers these tips and advice:

- **Consult a doctor.** If you have a 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.
- **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.
- **Don't eat 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.
- **Listen to your body.** If you feel the warning signs for heart attack, stop what you're doing immediately and call 9-1-1.

**The warning signs of a heart attack include and anyone experiencing these symptoms should call 9-1-1 immediately:**

- Uncomfortable pressure, fullness, squeezing or pain in the center of the chest that lasts for more than a few minutes, or goes away and comes back.
- Pain spreading to the shoulders, neck and arms.
- Chest discomfort with lightheadness, fainting, sweating, nausea or shortness of breath.

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For a related health story (see below) visit <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.ihtml?identifier=3027168>

**Death rates peak during the winter holidays** – Cardiac and non-cardiac deaths peak during Christmas and New Year's in part because people delay seeking medical treatment, researchers report in *Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association*. In DOA emergency department and outpatient groups, more cardiac deaths occurred on Dec. 25 than on any other day of the year. The second-largest number of deaths was on Dec. 26, and the third-largest number was on Jan. 1.