

Health Tips & News

Family and Child Health

Wintertime Health and Safety

Let it snow...

Sing along while you let it snow, let it snow, let it snow - but you know that eventually you'll have to reach for that shovel and start digging out. But this, too, can be fun as long as you keep a few things in mind when shovelling.

Keep warm to avoid hypothermia, which comes from your body's inability to produce more heat than it is losing when exposed to the cold, dropping its internal temperature below 35°C. Always wear a hat, gloves or mitts, and waterproof boots when shovelling. And cover your face, especially if you have blood pressure problems.

Would you know how to recognize and treat hypothermia and frostbite?

- The early warning signs of hypothermia are shivering and slurred speech, usually followed by confusion or lack of coordination. Increase your body temperature by getting out of the cold if you can as soon as possible. Knowing what can cause hypothermia is your best defence against it. The main culprits are windy, wet, and cold conditions. Cold, windy air chills the body, while wetness absorbs the body heat. Always wear a hat, gloves or mitts, and waterproof boots when shovelling to protect yourself against hypothermia.
- When skin becomes numb and looks white and waxy, you know you have frostbite. Touch the skin. Is it firm to the touch but soft underneath? This means that your skin has lost heat. So act fast to avoid more heat loss. Use the heat of your hands to re-warm the frozen skin by gently placing your hands on the area. Be careful - tiny ice particles in the frozen skin can damage the tissue if you rub it, so don't! And if your skin turns grayfish-blue and becomes hard to the touch, try to warm up and see a doctor immediately.

Remember, if your skin is not covered, it will freeze if exposed to temperatures below -25°C. When it's that cold outside, there is an increased risk of hypothermia and frostbite. If you don't have to go out, stay indoors. But if staying in is not an option, bundle up!

Don't over-exert yourself.

- **Pace yourself**, especially if you have a heart condition, high blood pressure, or back problems. Avoid doing all your shovelling at once. By shovelling frequently, and by preventing the snow from piling up, you can avoid staying out in the cold for prolonged periods, overexerting yourself, and lifting heavy snow.
- Before going out in the cold, **warm up** by doing back- and side-bending exercises, and make sure you drink water before and after shovelling.
- **Lift smart!** To avoid injuring your back, try not to lift a shovel full of snow. Instead, using a lightweight, pusher-type shovel, bend your knees, and hold the shovel close to you as you push the snow to the side. This will also help reduce twisting or turning movements that could hurt your back.
- **Give yourself a break!** Rest if you get tired. And if you are experiencing a chest or back pain, put the shovel down. Heart attacks have been known to occur when heavy lifting was performed in cold weather.

Tip of the Month

We are **already less than 40 days from the deadline for 2009 RRSP contributions** which is **March 1, 2010**. Now is a good time to look at your tax situation for 2009 and see how a **contribution into a RRSP** may be able to help you from paying back any money to Revenue Canada this year or even get you back a nice return on your 2009 taxes.

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