

## **Be Smart When Clearing Old Man Winter's Snow**

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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The Midwest is facing its first major winter storm, with more to follow since we're just starting the winter season. That could make for a lot of snow shoveling, and the potential for serious injury.

More than 195,000 people are injured every year due to accidents from snow shoveling with the majority of injuries back, head, broken bones, or heart attacks/strokes.

While most people won't have a problem, shoveling snow can increase the risk of heart attack because of excess exertion coupled with the cold weather. It is recommended those over 55 or anyone with a previous heart-related issue get the okay from their doctor before picking up a shovel or pushing a heavy snow blower.

But, more often, snow shoveling leads to injuries caused by improper shoveling technique, especially with wet, heavy snow.

"You should take small bites with the shovel, take little loads, try not to take giant loads. Snow can be very heavy and it's repetitive. Try not to twist with your back, lift with your legs and make sure that you have a good working snow shovel that's the right size for the job," explains Dr. John Hafner, emergency medicine physician at OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center in Peoria, Illinois.

OSF Saint Francis sees more than 76,000 emergency department visits each year. Dr. Hafner says it's easy to overdo when it comes to clearing snow.

Another risk for everyone during the winter months is ice, which can cause falls leading to broken bones, or even serious head injuries.

"This time of year there's a lot of ice and there's often times ice underneath the snow when we have repetitive thaw and freeze cycles. So you have to be very careful about hidden ice and, again, it's much more important for you to not have an injury than to worry so much about clearing things. If you can avoid it, try to stay off the ice whenever possible," said Dr. Hafner.

He also reminds everyone to bundle up properly when heading outside, including wearing a hat and gloves in addition to layers under a coat. He says prolonged skin exposure to the cold air can cause frost bite or hypothermia in a relatively short period of time as the temperatures drop.

Check out more snow shoveling safety tips [here](#).