

Healthy Living



Stay Safe During Winter Activities

When snow, ice and frigid weather blast into town, the chance for injuries can increase, too. Winter recreational activities and chores can pose problems for the outdoor enthusiast whose body is unconditioned. Winter sports such as skating, skiing and sledding can cause painful muscle spasms, strains or tears, especially if you're out of shape. Even shoveling snow the wrong way, clambering awkwardly over snow banks, slipping on sidewalks and wearing the wrong kinds of clothing can lead to spasms, strains and sprains.

In winter, simply walking outside in the freezing weather without layers of warm clothing can intensify older joint problems and cause 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 areas of the body that are most vulnerable, can help you avoid injury.

Warm Up

Simply put, warming up is essential. When pressed for time, it's better to shorten the length of your workout or activity and maintain a good warm-up than to skip it and dive right in. You can complete a good warm-up in 15-20 minutes, and it will make your workout or activity more pleasant and safe. Try incorporating the following sport-specific exercises into your full warm-ups for these winter activities:



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.



Skiing

Do 10 to 15 squats. Stand with your legs shoulder width apart and knees aligned over your feet. Slowly lower your buttocks as you bend your knees, as if sitting in a chair. Stand up straight again. It's a good idea to wear layers because you may be going from a cold environment (outdoors) to a warm environment (indoors).



Sledding

Do knee-to-chest stretches to fight compression injuries caused by repetitive bouncing over the snow. While 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 sports. At the bottom of the sledding hill, for instance, do some additional knee-to-chest stretches or repetitive squatting movements—to your individual tolerance—to restore flexibility.



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Shoveling Snow

Shoveling snow without proper preparation can wreak havoc on the musculoskeletal system. Consider the following tips to help prevent injury:



Layer clothing to keep your muscles warm and flexible. Shoveling can strain deconditioned muscles between your shoulders and in your upper back, lower back, buttocks and legs. Do some warm-up stretching before you grab the shovel.



When you do shovel, push the snow straight ahead. Walk it to the snowbank—don't try to throw it. Avoid sudden twisting and turning motions.



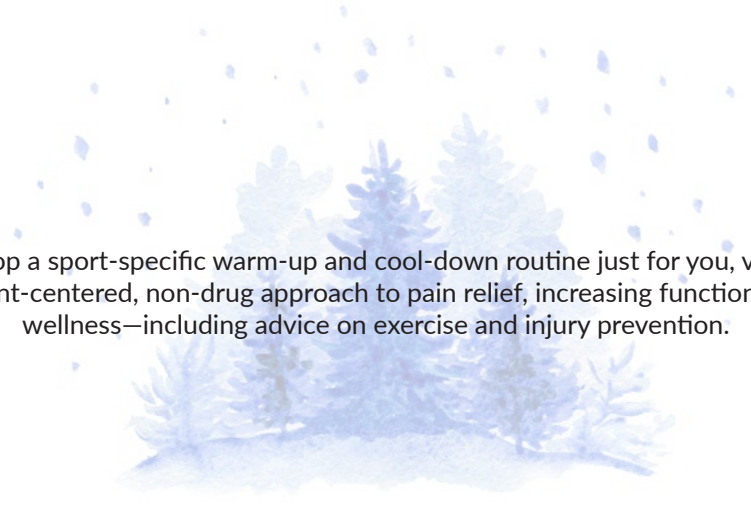
Bend your knees to lift when shoveling. Let the muscles of your legs and arms take some of the strain of shoveling off your back.



Take frequent rest breaks to take the strain off your muscles. A fatigued body asks for injury.



Stop shoveling if you experience chest pain, shortness of breath, or get very tired. You may need emergency medical assistance.



To treat injuries or to develop a sport-specific warm-up and cool-down routine just for you, visit a doctor of chiropractic. Chiropractors offer a patient-centered, non-drug approach to pain relief, increasing function and enhancing health and wellness—including advice on exercise and injury prevention.

For more information on prevention and wellness, or to find a doctor of chiropractic near you, visit

www.HandsDownBetter.org



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