

Providing trusted reporting to strengthen local knowledge

The North Dakota News Cooperative provides original, nonpartisan reporting to newspapers across the state at no cost, helping local editors serve their communities with credible information. NDNC stories cover a wide range of topics important to North Dakotans, including agriculture, energy, health care, education, and rural issues.

“Our goal is to make sure every newsroom in North Dakota has access to strong, nonpartisan reporting,” said Sabrina Halvorson, CEO of the North Dakota News Cooperative. “When local editors have credible information at their fingertips, communities are better informed and better served.”

This reporting supports small and mid-sized newsrooms that may not have the resources to cover statewide policy or in-depth topics on their own. By supplying reliable, deeply reported stories, NDNC helps ensure readers in every region of the state have access to clear, factual

journalism that strengthens public understanding of complex issues.

Community support makes this service possible. Contributions to the North Dakota News Cooperative help sustain independent reporting that benefits dozens of local newspapers and the readers they serve.

“These gifts ensure that hometown news outlets can continue to publish trustworthy coverage without increasing costs for rural communities,” Halvorson said.

If you’d like to support this mission, please consider a year-end gift to the North Dakota News Cooperative by visiting <https://newscoopnd.org/donate>. Or, contact NDNC at 501 E Main Ave, Suite 75, Bismarck, ND, 58501. Through December 31, donations are matched through NewsMatch, which makes your gift go twice as far.

The North Dakota News Cooperative is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization.

Be careful out there to stay heart-healthy

The American Heart Association cautions public about the exertion of shoveling snow

Walking in a winter wonderland may sound serene and peaceful, however, shoveling your sidewalks to take that walk could quickly change delightful to deadly. According to the American Heart Association, the world’s leading nonprofit organization focused on heart and brain health for all, research shows that the exertion of shoveling snow may lead to an increased risk of a heart attack or sudden cardiac arrest. In rural communities where EMS responses can be delayed and minutes matter, it’s important to be aware of the signs and symptoms and seek treatment quickly.

The American Heart Association’s 2020 scientific statement, Exercise-Related Acute Cardiovascular Events and Potential Deleterious Adaptations Following Long-Term Exercise Training: Placing the Risks Into Perspective—An Update, notes snow shoveling among the physical activities that may place extra stress on the heart, especially among people who aren’t used to regular exercise. Numerous scientific research studies over the years have identified the dangers of shoveling snow for people with and without known heart disease.

“Research has found that the strain of heavy snow shoveling may be as demanding on the heart than taking a treadmill stress test. Combined with the dangers of exertion in extremely cold weather, you’re looking at a perfect storm for a heart-related event,” said Tom Stys, MD, an interventional cardiologist with Sanford Health. “The impact can be worse on those people who are the least fit.”

Stys noted several ways snow shoveling affects heart health:

- The act of shoveling snow is mostly arm work, which is more taxing and demanding on the heart than leg work.
- While straining to lift heavy loads, such as a shovelful of snow, you often unconsciously hold your breath, which causes big increases in heart rate and blood pressure.
- Exposure to cold air causes constriction of blood vessels throughout the body, disproportionately raising blood pressure and simultaneously constricting the coronary arteries.

“The movements of snow shoveling are very taxing and demanding on your body and can cause significant increases in your heart rate and blood pressure,” Stys said. “Combined with the fact that the exposure to cold air can constrict blood vessels throughout the body, you’re asking your heart to do a lot more work in conditions that are already diminishing the heart’s ability to function at its best.”

Stys cautioned that the impact of snow removal is especially concerning for people who already have cardiovascular risks like a sedentary lifestyle or obesity, being a current or former smoker, having diabetes, high cholesterol or high blood pressure, as well as people who have had a heart attack or stroke.

“People with these characteristics and those who have had bypass surgery or coronary angioplasty simply should not be shoveling snow in any conditions,” he said. “We often see events in people who are usually sedentary, they work at a computer all day or get little or no exercise. Then once or twice a year, they go out and try to shovel the driveway after a heavy snowfall, and that unexpected exertion can unfortunately lead to tragedy.”

Stys recommends the following tips to reduce increased risk from snow shoveling:

- If you have known or suspected heart disease or risk factors for heart disease, get someone else to do your snow removal for you!
- If you must shovel the snow, start gradually and pace yourself. Always cover your mouth and nose, wear layered clothing, as well as a hat and gloves.
- Ideally, push or sweep the snow rather than lifting and throwing it; that action involves a little less exertion.
- Be extra careful when the wind is blowing, as the wind makes the temperature feel even colder than it is and will increase the effects of the cold on your body.
- If you are able, use an automated snow blower rather than shoveling. While you should still proceed with caution and be mindful of how your body is feeling, research shows that using a snow blower doesn’t raise your heart rate quite as high as shoveling.

The American Heart Association urges everyone to learn the common signs of a heart attack and stroke. If you experience chest pain or pressure, lightheadedness, or heart palpitations or irregular heart rhythms, stop the activity immediately. Call 9-1-1 if symptoms don’t subside shortly after you stop shoveling or snow blowing. If you see someone collapse while shoveling snow, call for help and start Hands-Only CPR if they are unresponsive with no pulse.

Learn more about cold weather and cardiovascular disease at heart.org.

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