



HSHS St. Elizabeth's Hospital Stresses Snow Safety

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O'FALLON— Winter is here, and snow has already covered many regions of the United States. With the possible snow event expected for the region, HSHS St. Elizabeth's Hospital and Prairie Heart Institute want to ensure area residents stay as safe as possible when venturing outdoors.

Slips and falls can cause serious harm as conditions of roads, parking lots and sidewalks worsen in winter weather. Additionally, snow shoveling is responsible for thousands of injuries and as many as [100 deaths](#) each year nationwide, according to the National Safety Council.

“Shoveling snow can be a strenuous activity, even for those who are physically fit,” says Dr. Regina Chiu, Prairie Heart Institute cardiologist. “At colder temperatures, heart rate and blood pressure can increase, as well as the risk of exhaustion, dehydration, back injuries and even heart attacks.”

Here are some tips to be mindful of over the next few months to avoid slips and falls:

- Beware of wet, dark areas on the pavement. There may be thin, hardly visible layers of ice (black ice) on these spots as a result of dew or water vapor freezing. It is best to treat all of these areas as slippery in cold temperatures.
- Walk slowly and take short strides. Use handrails when walking up or down steps. Choose well-walked paths and avoid taking shortcuts, since these areas may not be accessible for snow or ice removal.
- Keep your hands free and extend your arms while walking. Avoid carrying too much or placing your hands in your pockets. This will keep your center of gravity from decreasing and help to maintain balance.

Keeping your driveway and walkway clear of snow and ice is, in most cases, a necessity and will help prevent falls this winter. But it is important to not overexert yourself which can lead to serious health issues.

Follow these snow-shoveling tips to help keep you safe this winter.

- Know if you shouldn't shovel. Certain people should avoid shoveling snow. If you have a history of heart problems, you should discuss with your doctor.
- Dress appropriately. Wear light clothing in layers to provide both ventilation and insulation. To keep warm, wear a hat, gloves and thick socks. Avoid falls by wearing shoes or boots with slip-resistant soles.
- Warm up first. Before you begin shoveling the snow, warm up your muscles for approximately 10 minutes by doing stretches or other light exercises.
- Use proper equipment. Use a shovel that is comfortable for your height and strength. Do not use a shovel that is too heavy or too long for you. Space your hands on the tool grip to increase your leverage.
- Lift snow correctly. Try to push the snow instead of lifting it. If you must lift, do it properly. Squat with your legs apart, knees bent and back straight. Lift with your legs. Avoid bending at the waist. Scoop small amounts of snow into the shovel and walk to where you want to dump it. Holding a shovelful of snow with your arms outstretched puts too much weight on your spine. Never remove deep snow all at once. Do it in pieces.
- Avoid overexerting yourself. Be very careful not to overexert yourself as you work. Pace yourself and take breaks often. It's a good idea to go indoors to warm up. Taking five to 10 minutes to relax gives your body time to rest. Pay attention to the signals your body is sending. If you feel pain or pressure in your chest, call your doctor right away.
- Choose chemical products carefully. Putting a layer of rock salt (sodium chloride) on icy areas is an effective way to melt the ice. However, rock salt can cause damage to concrete and metal surfaces and is also harmful to plants. Magnesium chloride is less corrosive than other chemical products and works well for melting ice. Before using any ice-melting products read the labels carefully.

“In addition, it is always best to check with your doctor to make sure that it is all right for you to shovel snow. If you have a medical condition or are not used to strenuous exercise, it may be safer to have someone else clear the snow,” said Dr. Chiu. “If you are shoveling snow or using a snow blower and experience chest pain, shortness of breath, or other sudden or severe symptoms, stop immediately and call 9-1-1.”