

COLD-WEATHER SAFETY

Regardless of the amount of snow we get, every year I see a number of patients with cold-weather-related injuries. With a few precautions, you can prevent many of these problems—and come see me for a wellness visit or a preventive tune-up instead!

When shoveling:

- Before you bundle up, warm up. Start with some gentle range-of-motion stretching, then move on to more specific stretches I've shown you for your particular problem areas. Or maybe even do several rounds of yogic sun salutations. (I like the yoga option because you'll warm and move every major muscle group while getting your breathing primed for the deep, steady inhalations that make exertion easier.)
- Use an ergonomic shovel with a wide, shallow bowl and a bent handle.
- Keep your back upright while shoveling; bend at the knees instead of the waist. That way, you'll use your legs to lift the weight of the snow—they're stronger than your back.
- If we happen to have blizzard conditions (here's hoping we don't!), avoid throwing shoveled snow over high drifts. Keep it below your chest.

Believe it or not, you can often prevent slips on the ice, too, or at least lessen their impact:

- Improve your overall balance by practicing standing on one foot. Start off facing a corner. As your balance improves, challenge yourself by lifting the leg higher, closing your eyes, or standing on a stability disc.
- Your reaction time to events is actually something you can cultivate: practice hitting the snooze button on your alarm clock (while awake!). Better reflexes means less chance of falling.
- Maintain a strong core (hello, pilates!) for better stability and body mechanics.
- Notice when you hunch your shoulders against the cold, and make a conscious effort to actively pull them down and back (as in the "super-soldier" exercise). A tight upper back and rounded shoulders change your center of gravity, destabilizing you and making falls more likely.