

Winter weather, snow shoveling pose heart risks

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Expert gives tips for cold-weather heart health.

(HealthDay)—As temperatures fall during the winter months, the risk for heart attacks rises for people with heart conditions and those engaging in rigorous physical activity.

"When the temperature outside drops, our blood vessels narrow to prevent our bodies from losing heat," Dr. Holly Andersen, at the Ronald O. Perleman Heart Institute of the New York-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center, said in a medical center news release. "This is a natural response that can also put people with [heart conditions](#) and those involved in [strenuous exercise](#) at greater risk of having a heart attack."

Many people are unaware of the dangers that low temperatures and [winter storms](#) can pose to their hearts, cautioned Andersen, who is director of education and outreach at the medical center. Shoveling snow, for example, is one of the most exhausting and risky activities people do in the winter since it can raise blood pressure and dramatically increase people's risk for a heart attack.

To protect your heart health this winter, Andersen offered the following safety tips:

- Stretch and warm up your muscles with light activity before engaging in rigorous physical activity, such as shoveling.
- Stay warm. Wear a scarf over your mouth and nose to warm the air you breathe. Dress in layers and cover up with a windproof and waterproof [outer shell](#).
- Instead of lifting a shovel, push it to remove snow.
- Pace yourself and take breaks while you are shoveling snow.
- Enlist a friend to help you shovel. This way you will have less work to do and will not be alone in case of an emergency.

Anyone who is overweight, older than 50 or has suffered a heart attack should talk to their doctor before shoveling snow or starting a new [exercise program](#).

More information: The U.S. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute has more about [heart attack prevention](#).

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