Genesis Physiotherapy's Stretching Guide for Snow Shovelling

Stretching is essential when heading out to tackle the accumulating snow. Snow shovelling accounts for many injuries each season seen both in the local emergency department as well as at Genesis Physiotherapy. Therefore the snow removal job needs to be taken seriously and treated like any other physical activity you are about to engage in. A stretching routine can help you avoid a snow shovelling injury. Stretching before and after shovelling helps to minimize muscle imbalances, prevent injury, and improve your ability to shovel for longer periods. The following stretching program is designed for people who do not have any current injuries or individual stretching needs. If you have an injury, or a specific mechanical imbalance that may be inhibiting your ability to shovel, your Genesis Physiotherapy physiotherapist can design a stretching program more specific for you.

When is the Best Time to Stretch?

When your muscles are warm and relaxed! For optimum performance you should stretch after you have done a general body warm up of about 5-10 minutes. A brisk walk around your house or yard to get the heart rate and body temperature up can do the trick. Use this time to assess the snow situation and figure out the best plan for removing the accumulating snow.

Dynamic stretches are used prior to shovelling and are essential in preparing your muscles for the powerful movements required to push, lift and toss the snow. If the weather is warm enough, the pre-shovelling stretches should be done in in a safe non-slip area outside, or can be done inside your garage or entry-way after your warm up. Be sure not to let your body cool down between warming it up and starting the shovelling or you will become chilled. Static stretches, on the other hand, are more useful to improve your overall flexibility and are most effectively done after you have finished the shovelling and are back in the warm house.

Rules for Dynamic Stretching:

- Warm up your body first, then stretch while your muscles are still warm and do not let your body cool down before engaging in the task at hand.
- Move through your range of movement, keeping control of the movement with your muscles. Do not allow momentum to control the movement by "flinging" or "throwing" your body parts around.
- You may feel light resistance in your muscles, but you should never feel pain during a stretch.
- Start with slow, low intensity movements, and gradually progress to full-speed movements through range of motion. Complete these motions for several repetitions (10-15 times.)

Rules for Static Stretching:

- Be sure to stretch while the muscles are still warm after shovelling.
- Slowly take your muscles to the end of their range. You will feel slight resistance in the muscle, but you should never feel pain during a stretch.
- Hold the stretch in a static position. Do not bounce.
- Maintain each stretch for 20-30 seconds. Repeat each stretch 3-4 times.

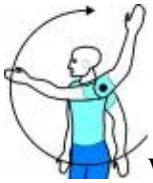
Essential Stretches for Snow Shovelling:

These muscles are the key muscles used when snow shovelling. Don't forget to stretch both sides. The stretching program shown below will take about 10-12 minutes to complete.

Dynamic Stretches:

Arm Swings

Shoulder Swings

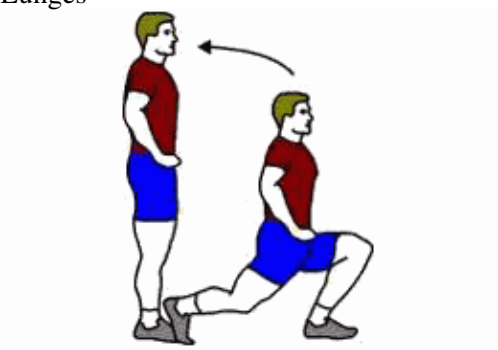


Wrist Circles

Leg Swings Forward and Back

Back Rotation Stretch

Lunges



Static Stretches

Neck Stretch

Posterior Shoulder Stretch

Standing Back Extension Stretch

Hamstring stretch

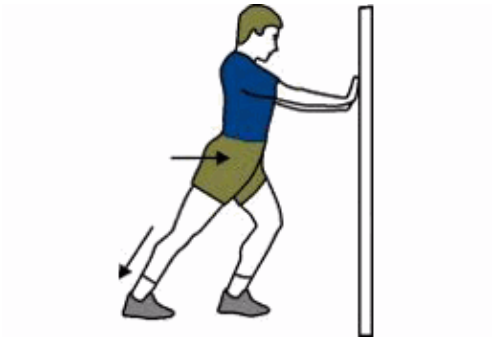
Quadriceps stretch

Hip Flexor Stretch

Wrist Extensors

Wrist Flexor

Calf Stretch-Gastrocnemius



Other Relevant Links:

- Selecting snow shovelling equipment
- Common shovelling injuries