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With winter around the corner it's time to start thinking about dreaded snow storms and the sometimes daunting task of shoveling sidewalks.

Snow shoveling is a repetitive activity that can cause muscle strain to the lower back and shoulders.

Here is some advice to help avoid injuries this winter:

Lift smaller loads of snow and be sure to bend the knees and lift with the legs rather than the back.

Use a snow shovel with a shaft length that helps you keep the back straight while lifting. A short shovel will cause a shoveler to bend more while lifting, while using one that is too long makes the weight heavier at the end.

Be sure to step in the direction the snow is being thrown to prevent the low back from twisting. The lumbar spine does not tolerate loaded twisting as well as it does other movements.

Take frequent breaks when shoveling by standing up straight and walking around to extend the low back.

Backward bending exercises while standing help reverse the excessive forward bending of shoveling.

If you happen to experience back pain with shoveling or any other activity, consult a local physician or physical therapist.