

## January Nursing Notes – Snow Shoveling Risks and Glaucoma Awareness Month

### **Can shoveling snow be dangerous to your heart?**

This simple burst of hard work can put some of us at risk for a heart attack. Experts caution that you have a heightened risk of having a heart attack after shoveling heavy amounts of snow. Cardiologist Luke Laffin, MD, says many people underestimate just how strenuous snow shoveling can actually be. “Snow shoveling is very similar to being at peak exercise on a stress test, so it puts a lot of strain on your heart,” he says. “And for someone who isn’t used to actually exercising and being physically fit, it can predispose them to heart attacks.” Dr. Laffin says any significant onset of chest pain, trouble breathing or pain that radiates down the arm or into the neck are hallmark signs of a potential heart attack. Those are reasons to stop and seek medical attention right away. In addition, if you notice you’re getting tired more easily, feeling like a cold sweat is coming on or feeling light-headed, these could also be signs of a heart attack. Shoveling itself isn’t necessarily bad for you—it’s more the conditions under which you’re shoveling that can cause cardiac events. Too much exertion, too quickly, can trigger a heart attack—especially in the cold—when our arteries tend to constrict, which in turn, can drive up our blood pressure. Your risk of a heart attack also increases if you’ve been more sedentary than usual in the winter months. If you plan to (or need to) shovel anyway, Dr. Laffin suggests you should weigh your risks and benefits and proceed accordingly. To safely shovel snow, try to follow these five tips:

- Don’t push yourself too hard. Take your time shoveling. If you feel your body beginning to get tired, go inside and rest for awhile.
- Make the chore manageable. Try not to tackle your entire driveway all at once. Instead, Dr. Laffin says it’s smarter to divide up the work and take frequent breaks.
- Treat shoveling like you would any other sport or exercise routine. Stay warm, dress appropriately and stay hydrated while shoveling. It’s critical.
- Pay careful attention to how you feel both before and after shoveling snow. If you or a loved one begins to show signs of heart trouble, or has trouble breathing after shoveling snow, call 911 immediately and seek medical attention. If you’re not sure, it’s better to get it checked out.
- If you have more than one medical condition or are over the age of 55, Dr. Laffin says it’s best to get someone else to shovel for you. It’s simply not worth the risk to your health. “Particularly people that have multiple medical conditions such as coronary artery disease or hypertension, or maybe they’re overweight or obese and don’t get a lot of physical activity—it’s not worth it to risk your heart,” he says. “I think hiring the kid down the street is a great idea,” Dr. Laffin says.

For more information, go to: <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/snow-shoveling-a-real-risk-for-heart-attack/>

**January is National Glaucoma Awareness Month.** Glaucoma occurs when there is damage to the optic nerve, often due to pressure inside the eye. This pressure builds when the eye's aqueous fluid cannot drain properly. Damage from the pressure causes loss of peripheral vision, and, eventually, blindness. The International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness reports that glaucoma is the third leading cause of blindness globally. Glaucoma often runs in families, and frequently occurs in individuals over 60. In addition, it disproportionately affects people of Asian and African descent, accounting for 60 and 13 percent of all glaucoma cases, respectively. Men are more likely than women to have primary open-angle glaucoma, the most common form of the disease in the U.S. Ophthalmologists recommend the following strategies to reduce the risk of developing glaucoma:

1. Exercise frequently and maintain a well-balanced diet
2. Schedule regular eye exams in order to detect the condition before vision loss occurs
3. Follow your doctor's instructions regarding regular use of eye drops to prevent intraocular pressure build-up

For most people, there are usually few or no symptoms of glaucoma. The first sign of glaucoma is often the loss of peripheral or side vision, which can go unnoticed until late in the disease. This is why glaucoma is often called the "sneak thief of vision." But if you have any of the following symptoms, seek immediate medical care:

- *Seeing halos around lights*
- *Vision loss*
- *Redness in the eye*
- *Eye that looks hazy (particularly in infants)*
- *Nausea or vomiting*
- *Pain in the eye*
- *Narrowing of vision (tunnel vision)*

For more information, go

to: <https://www.seeintl.org/glaucoma/> and <http://allmedicinedata.info/glaucoma-symptoms-risks-treatment/>

To contact Diane or Glenn, parish nurses, you can leave a message for them at 540-662-3824.