

The Wellness Express™



Jump on the train to good health

Issue 1, November 2011

Winter Activities – a likely cause for acute low back pain?

Presented by:

As summer turns into fall, and fall into winter, chiropractors prepare themselves to receive a healthy number of new patients – related to some of the more common winter activities and their contribution to a greater incidence of acute lower back pain.

As the calendar pages are turned to the fall months, people put their bathing suits and beach towels away as they anticipate the first snowfall of the year. As they dig into their closets however, reaching for their skis, skates, snow shovels and sleds most don't think of how often these fun-filled activities can lead to debilitating lower back pain.

A few of the most notable causes for injury in the winter months include:

1. Slips and falls – with icy conditions.
2. Snow shovelling – a strenuous winter-related activity.
3. Dangerous winter sports.

Slips and falls:

When the temperature starts to drop below the freezing point, chiropractors warm up their adjusting muscles. With snow and ice covering walkways and other surfaces, people are more likely

Presented by:

to slip and fall, adding to the list of reasons they visit their chiropractor.

Acute injuries resulting from slips and falls can range from a slightly-bruised ego, to subluxations and dislocations of the pelvis, or even fractures in the tailbone or wrist.

One of the first things you should do if you experience a fall this winter is to check in with your chiropractor. The jarring effects of a fall can easily subluxate your sacroiliac joints or lumbar spine and lead to more chronic issues if these subluxations are not corrected right away.

Snow shovelling:

Winter snow looks so soft and fluffy as it floats down to the earth, but when we attempt to clear our sidewalks of the frozen white stuff one shovel-full at a time, what we discover is that it's not as easy as we first imagined. Snow gets easily packed and dense, and sometimes when the temperatures hover around the freezing point, the wetness of the snow can make it much heavier than it looks.

Shovelling snow is a physically-demanding exercise that puts a great demand on the heart (thus putting us at

Exercise of the Week

Lumbar extension – “lazy cow”

Difficulty: Beginner to Moderate

(Consult your chiropractor before engaging in this or any other exercise.)

Start: On hands and knees. Be aware of position of spine – start with a neutral spine or a flat back.

Exercise: Allow spine to sag toward floor, bringing lumbar spine into full extension. Also extend neck by bringing chin up toward the ceiling. Hold for 10-15 seconds.



greater risk for heart attacks). And, it can easily lead to sprains and strains of the lower back, wrists, elbows and shoulders. If you find yourself a painful victim of ‘shovelitis’ (a term used here to describe the acute lower back pain and inflammation following an afternoon of moving snow), your next step should be to make an appointment with your chiropractor.

If you’re looking to prevent that next bout of ‘shovelitis’, follow these helpful tips this winter:

1. Warm up before heading out into the cold – by stretching those tight muscles before using them.
2. Don’t over-load your shovel with snow – one shovel full of wet snow can weigh up to 25 pounds!
3. Always lift with your legs – be sure to bend your knees, not your back, when lifting loads of snow.
4. Don’t bend and twist – the worst combination for disc injuries. Avoid throwing snow over your shoulder!
5. Take a break! Taking regular breaks can help prevent getting over-tired, which is when you are most likely to injure yourself.

Winter sports:

Common winter sports – like skiing, snow-boarding, hockey and tobogganing – not only involve many falls and spills, but also various activity-specific injuries.

Skiers and snowboarders often suffer knee and back injuries because of all

the twisting motions involved in those sports – plus, thumb and wrist injuries are common.

Tobogganers have to watch out for injuries to the head and lower limbs caused by collisions with stationary objects and other people.

Hockey players need to be particularly aware of the dangers of their sport: Because it is a contact sport involving high speeds, sprains and subluxations are the number one injury in hockey, followed by contusions and lacerations. Of course, fans of NHL player Sidney Crosby will also be acutely aware of the ever-present potential for concussions in hockey – a devastating and serious problem in this sport.

We all know that winter sports can be fun, but we also need to be aware of the risks!

Luckily, your Doctor of Chiropractic knows how to safely and effectively take care of all those winter back pains. According to a recent article in the journal *Spine*, chiropractic treatment of acute low back pain is one of the most effective options and it is accomplished with minimal, if any, side-effects. Symptoms related to pain reduce more quickly and the effects of the chiropractic adjustment last longer than other treatments (like medications, exercise, etc.) compared to chiropractic!

Whatever activities you are planning to participate in this year, be sure to schedule a chiropractic appointment afterwards, just in case!

Quote to Inspire

“Snowflakes are one of nature’s most fragile things, but just look what they can do when they stick together”

- Vesta M. Kelly

References and sources:

1. Snow shoveling: Colorado Spine Institute
<http://www.coloradospineinstitute.com/subject.php?pn=wellness-snow-shoveling>
2. Skiers/snowboarders: www.ski-injury.com
<http://www.ski-injury.com/specific-sports/snowboard-injuries>
3. Tobogganing: Ontario Injury Compass, Vol.3 (12). An analysis of injury issues in Ontario. Tobogganning Injuries – December 2006 – <http://www.oninjuryresources.ca/downloads/Compass/2006/2006--12-OICompass-tobogganing.pdf>
4. Hockey: www.injuryresearch.bc.ca
<http://www.injuryresearch.bc.ca/Publications/Fact%20Sheets/IceHockey%20fact%20sheet.pdf>
5. Chiropractic: The Spine Journal Spinal Manipulation for Acute Low Back Pain. *Spine* 2010; 10: 918–940. (Dagenais et al.)

Editor & writer: David Coyne
Writer: Dr. Christian Guenette, DC
Writer: Sandra Taylor
Design: Elena Zhukova
Graphics: Faith Ruba
Photos: Fred Goldstein
Production: Mike Talarico

Disclaimer: Information contained in the Wellness Express™ newsletter is for educational and general purposes only and is designed to assist you in making informed decisions about your health. Any information contained herein is not intended to substitute advice from your physician or other healthcare professional.