

# Dr. Colin Gage \* Dr. Duane Drobot

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Nicola Valley Chiropractic  
1949 Quilchena Ave.  
P.O. Box 909  
Merritt, BC  
V1K 1B8

Ph: (250) 378-5456  
Fax: (250) 378-8259  
Email: info@merrittchiro.com  
Website: www.merrittchiro.com

*"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"*

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## Shoveling Snow Can be a Pain in the Back

As the white stuff begins to accumulate on our sidewalks and driveway, we have the erroneous task of getting out there and shoveling it. So far, we have been fairly lucky and the snowfall has been light in weight and volume. As with every year when that first big snowfall arrives, I will be anticipating the rush of patients into my office suffering with acute low back pain. Most of us are not accustomed to a long stint of physical work that requires a lot of low back movement and strength. So when we challenge ourselves too much, problems often arise.

The scenario I most often see includes the average person who is mildly active. He or she does not necessarily have arthritis or old injuries in their back to predispose them to having problems. What I often see is a fairly normal person that has mildly stiff joints and muscles in their back, but not enough to cause pain or restrict any regular activities. For example, when we were young, very active, and healed quickly, our lower back had 100% of its potential movement and strength. Now that we are a little older and usually much less active, it may only be at 80% of its potential. This doesn't interfere with our work or day to day activities. However, when we go out and shovel that heavy wet snow for an hour and demand the full 100% of our back's potential, it cannot handle it. At first the back just feels a little stiff and perhaps weak. Then, after sitting down or relaxing for a while, the ache begins as the inflammation in the joints accumulates. If you are unlucky enough to have the inflammation around or near a nerve, the pain will become worse. Once the nerves are irritated, they begin to function at a higher level of intensity. Then, whatever the nerve is responsible for controlling, such as the muscles, will also function at a higher level of intensity. This is where the muscle spasms come from. They feel like waves of sharp pain that can hit you even with the smallest movements. You may also experience pain or tingling down one leg, commonly termed sciatica. At this point, it hurts to cough, laugh, sneeze, or to do just about anything.

After a day or so of "waiting for it to go away", they slowly walk into my office. The joints in their low back are now extremely stiff and sore. For any joint in our body to heal properly once it is injured, it must be able to move properly. The Chiropractor is trained to restore the proper range of motion of these stiff, sore, and inflamed joints. If the proper mobility of the joints is maintained, they will

heal at a much faster rate. It is only your body that can “heal” the joint. Chiropractors are just making your system work faster and more efficiently.

Once again, the best treatment for low back pain from shoveling snow is prevention of the injury in the first place. If you stretch and exercise your back regularly, you may already have enough of that 100% of back movement and strength to handle the job without the suffering. For those of us who don't, try this simple stretch before and after shoveling. Better yet, do this stretch every day. If you do not already have chronic low back pain or stiffness, you can also try the low back exercise. If you find this causes discomfort, stop doing it and see your chiropractor. The technique you use to shovel the snow is also important. Push the snow shovel in front of you. Don't push the snow at the side of your body in a sweeping motion. This will make your low back twist repetitively and you will be forced to lean to one side. If you use this improper motion, you are just asking for a sore back. If the snowfall is deep and heavy and you have a large area to do, don't try to shovel the entire driveway at once. The remaining snow will still be there the next day.

In summary, do the stretch regularly and don't try to do the shoveling all at once. If you do hurt your back, seek treatment so your recovery is as quick and successful as possible.