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

Shoveling Snow can be a Pain in the Back

As the white stuff begins to accumulate on our sidewalks and driveway, we will have the erroneous task of getting out there and shovelling it. As with every year when we receive a good dump of snow, I will be anticipating the rush of patients into my office suffering with acute low back pain. Most people are not accustomed to a long stint of physical work that requires a lot of low back movement and strength. So, when they challenge themselves too much, problems often arise.

The most common scenario involves an average person just like you that may not even have arthritis or an old injury that would predispose you to having problems. However, you may have mildly stiff joints and muscles in your back but not enough to cause pain or restrict any regular activities. This means that your lower back may have, for example, only 80% of its potential mobility and strength and you do not even know it. This would not interfere with your work or day-to-day activities and you would not even be consciously aware of it. However, when you go out and shovel that heavy wet snow for an hour and demand the full 100% of your back's potential, it can't handle it. At first your back may just feel 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 intensity or become "over stimulated". Then, whatever the nerve is responsible for controlling, such as the muscles, will also function at a higher intensity or become "over stimulated". This is where the muscle spasms originate. They feel like waves of sharp pain that can hit you even during the smallest movements. You may also experience pain or tingling down one leg, commonly termed "sciatica". At this point, it may even hurt to cough, laugh, sneeze, or to do just about anything. If you are stubborn, you will stall a day or so "waiting for it to go away". It is then that most people slowly walk into my office. The joints in your low back would now be extremely stiff and sore. For any joint in our body to heal properly once it is injured, it must be able to move properly. When it comes to restoring the proper range of motion of stiff, sore, and inflamed joints, no health care practitioner is more highly trained to do this than a chiropractor. Only when the mobility of the joints is fully restored and maintained will they heal naturally, completely, and at a much faster rate. It is also important for you to know that it is your body that "heals" the

joint, not a medication or the chiropractor. When a chiropractor restores the normal functioning of your spine, the joints are then able to heal faster and more efficiently.

An even better treatment for low back pain from shovelling snow is prevention of the injury in the first place. Other than seeing your chiropractor regularly, the technique you use to shovel the snow is also very 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. For simple low back warm-up exercises and stretches, visit our website at www.merrittchiro.com.