



Heart Attacks More Common in Winter

Excerpts from HealthDay News

Winter brings more than colds and flu. Did you know winter is also the season for heart attacks?

Frigid air causes blood vessels to constrict as the body tries to prevent heat loss. This is a natural response that can also put people with heart conditions and those involved in strenuous exercise at greater risk of having a heart attack.

The narrowing of blood vessels raises blood pressure and can reduce oxygen flow to the heart. Combined with a strenuous activity, such as shoveling snow, elevated B/P and reduced oxygen can strain the heart, triggering a heart attack in those at risk.

Symptoms of a heart attack may include pain, discomfort or a squeezing sensation in the chest, pain in the arms, back, neck or jaw, shortness of breath, nausea or a cold sweat, according to the American Heart Association. Though women may also experience pain, they are more likely than men to experience shortness of breath, nausea or vomiting and back or jaw pain. A heart attack can be mistaken for a pulled muscle, so take any post-shoveling symptoms seriously.

To lessen your risk of winter-time heart trouble:

- Don't jump out of bed and start shoveling your driveway. Warm up by stretching or walking before you start.
- Dress properly. Wear windproof and waterproof outer garments and wear layers. Place a scarf over your mouth and nose to warm up the air before you breathe it in.
- To avoid overexertion, try pushing the snow with the shovel rather than lifting it. Take frequent breaks -- shovel for 15 minutes, and then rest for 15.
- If you're over the age of 50 and are overweight, sedentary, smoke or have had a heart attack, consult a doctor before shoveling snow. You may want to hire a local teen-ager to do the job for you.