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### **Take Care Against Serious Shovel Injuries, Says Local Physical Therapy Doctor**

Frederick, MD... Many Marylanders are starting to wonder if the snow will ever end, and when they can stop the back-breaking and seemingly endless task of shoveling. Donald J. Novak, P.T., D.P. T. and owner of Amber Hill Physical Therapy, notes that due to its repetitive nature, snow shoveling can easily cause muscle strain in the lower back and shoulders, especially if a person is out of condition and doesn't lift properly.

Dr. Novak has these recommendations from the American Physical Therapy Association:

- Lift smaller loads of snow, rather than heavy shovelfuls.
- Bend your knees and lift with your legs rather than with your back.
- Use a shovel with a shaft that lets you keep your back straight while lifting. A short shaft will cause you to bend more to lift the load. Using a shovel that's too long makes the weight at the end heavier.
- Step in the direction in which you are throwing the snow to prevent the low back from twisting. This will help prevent "next-day back fatigue."
- Take frequent breaks and periodically stand up straight and walk around to extend the lower back.
- Backward bending exercises while standing will help reverse the excessive forward bending of shoveling: stand straight and tall, place your hands toward the back of your hips, and bend backwards slightly for several seconds.
- If you experience back pain, consult a licensed physical therapist.

To avoid injury in this and other activities, you may also need to learn some new habits. A physical therapist can evaluate your strength and flexibility and design a fitness program that meets your needs.

Amber Hills' four clinics treat a wide range of orthopedic, sports and automobile injuries, plus neurological, pediatric and wellness issues. They also offer private treatment rooms, and new patients are seen within 24 hours.

Their office locations are: 187 Thomas Johnson Dr., Ste, 6, Frederick, 301-663-1157; 9701 New Church St., Suite 3, Damascus, 301-253-0896; 120 Frederick Rd., Suite D, Thurmont, 301-271-9230; and 4014J Mountville Rd., Jefferson, 301-473-5900. For more information, visit [www.amberhillpt.com](http://www.amberhillpt.com).