

Yoga for Shoveling

So many of us are discovering low back pain in this winter that never ends.

Shoveling snow is often an exacerbator of low back pain whether you had it before the snow fell or not. There are some yoga poses that can make your winter a lot less painful, but first, make sure your form is correct when you are out there battling the drifts.

- Pick the right shovel
- Warm up thoroughly
- Pace yourself
- Always face towards the object you intend to lift (ie have your shoulders and hips both squarely facing it)
- Bend at the hips, not the low back, and push the chest out, pointing forward. Then, bend your knees and lift with your leg muscles, keeping your back straight
- Keep your loads light and do not lift an object that is too heavy for you
- If you must lift a shovel full, grip the shovel with one hand as close to the blade as comfortably possible and the other hand on the handle (handle and arm length will vary the technique)
- Avoid twisting the back to move your object to its new location – always pivot your whole body to face the new direction
- Keep the heaviest part of the object close to your body at your center of gravity - do not extend your arms to throw the snow
- Walk to the new location to deposit the item rather than reaching or tossing
- Just like we do in yoga class, lunge from both sides. For example, shovel 10 loads of snow on one side, and then switch sides for the next 10 loads.

Source: [Peter J. Schubbe, DC](#), “Snow Shoveling Techniques to Prevent Low Back Injuries”

Here’s a Gentle Yoga Sequence that may help to alleviate low-back pain from shoveling and strengthen your legs and core for more shoveling to come. (Hey, it’s Wisconsin. You know there will be more!). Enjoy!

Start in Constructive Rest (lying on back, knees pointed up to the ceiling, feet planted on the floor). Let your lower back relax into the floor. Start to engage your abdominal muscles. On your inhale, let your belly puff out, on your exhale, suck the belly button to the back of the spine. Continue this Diaphragmatic breathing for about five minutes.

Supine Dead Bug:

Bring Knees to 90 degree angles so that shin bones are parallel to the floor.

Bring arms to 90 degree angles so that forearms are parallel to the floor. Start moving the limbs oppositionally: right arm and left leg extend up straight to the

ceiling, left arm and right leg extend. Continue for 10 rounds

Knee to Chest:

Hug right knee to chest, hold for 10 breaths, other side. Then hug both knees to chest.

Supine Spinal Twist:

Knees above hips, scooch hips to the right, let the knees fall to the left. Hold for 10 breaths. Other side. You might want to slip a block or pillow in between the knees to stabilize the pelvis. Let the palms face upwards. Look up or in the same direction as the knees.

Seated Side Bend:

From a comfortable seated position, plant the right hand on the mat next to your right hip, stretch left arm up and over your head towards the right. Hold for 5 breaths. Other side.

Seated Twist with side bend:

Switch which leg is on top in your comfortable seated position. Place the right hand on the left knee, left hand on your heart. Inhale, grow taller, Exhale start to twist to the left starting from the lower spine and gradually bringing your chin over your left shoulder, eyes to the left corners of their sockets. Keep your hand on your heart or bring it behind you like a kickstand. With every inhale grow taller, exhale go a bit deeper. Hold for 5 breaths. Untwist, keeping your hand on your knee and stretch the left arm up and over your head towards the right. Look at your right knee. Hold for 5 breaths. Other side.

Cow/Child's Pose:

Come to hands and knees. Shoulders directly above wrists, hips directly above knees. Fingers spread out wide like starfish. Inhale lift the tailbone, stretch the heart forward (cow), Exhale, bring hips to heels, stretch arms forward (child's pose). Repeat 10 times.

Downward Facing Dog Prep:

In Table Top (hands and knees), tuck toes under and lift knees off the mat 2 inches. Without rounding the spine, press the hands into the mat and lift the armpits. Hold this for 10 breaths. Repeat 3 times. Rest in Child's Pose between each set.

Downward Facing Dog Flow:

Start in Child's Pose.

Exhale → Child's Pose

Inhale → Table Top

Exhale → Downward Facing Dog

Inhale → Table Top

Repeat 10 times

Standing Half Moon Pose:

Inhale, arms over head, grab hold of right wrist. Bend body to the left, push hips to right. Hold for 10 breaths. Other side. Try to keep the arms bones by your ears. Imagine you're squeezed between two panes of glass.

Crescent Warrior with knee bends:

Start at the top of your mat. Inhale, step right foot back, stay up on your toes. Bend front knee no more than a 90 degree angle. Hands on your hips. Start to fire up your core, fire up your inner thighs. Inhale straighten the front knee, Exhale, bend. Repeat this 10 times. Other side. Make sure your knee tracks in the same direction as your big and second toe.

Warrior II with knee bends:

Face the long side of your mat, spread your legs wide. Bring the right toes so they point towards the short end of your mat, bring the left toes in 45 degrees. Let the hips square to 45 degrees. Hands on hips to start. Inhale. Exhale bend the right knee. Inhale straighten. Do this 10 times. Other side.

Warrior II Flow:

Start in Warrior II with right knee bent. Inhale. Exhale, bring right elbow on top of right knee, stretch left arm up and over your head towards the right (Lateral side angle). Inhale, Warrior II. Exhale, bring left hand to outside of left leg, stretch right arm up to the ceiling, look up (Reverse Warrior). Inhale, Warrior II. Repeat 10 rounds. Other side.

Triangle:

(Starting on right side) With feet in Warrior II position, straighten both legs. Start to lean to the right, letting your hips glide to the left. Hinge from your hips and bring your right hand to your right shin bone or to the ground inside your right foot. You can use a block if you'd like. Stretch the left arm over your head. Hold this for 10 breaths. Other side.

You can try a flow with this as well. Substitute Lateral Side Angle for Triangle and Warrior II for Triangle Prep.

Bridge Lifts:

Come back to a lying down position on your back as we started in Constructive Rest. Feet are firmly planted on the ground. Inhale lift the pelvis using the power of your legs and feet (not the low back). Exhale release the pelvis to the mat. Repeat 3 sets of 10. In between each set, windshield wiper your knees.

Low Back Release:

Hug knees to chest, bring hands on kneecaps, start to draw circles on the ceiling with your knees first in one direction and then the other. Finish off with the gentle spinal twist we started with and relax in final Savasana.

If you have any questions, contact me at busteryoga@gmail.com

Namaste!
Natalie Buster