



November 26, 2011 – Grand Rapids, MI

## Valsalva

The snow has already fallen in many parts of the country, so I thought it was time to repeat this message on the reason people have heart attacks after shoveling snow.

Shoveling snow is heavy exercise. In effect, it's an isometric exercise combined with movement. When they lift the snow on the shovel, most people hold their breath. That creates a phenomenon called a Valsalva maneuver, named for Antonio Maria Valsalva, a 17th-Century Italian anatomist. Holding your breath forces your heart to beat against the pressure in the chest cavity and the contracted muscles of the arms. That increased resistance can cause problems in people who have preexisting heart disease. In effect, they vapor lock and have a heart attack. (This is also the reason many people die on the toilet straining to move their bowels.)

The solution is two-fold: first, don't hold your breath when you lift the snow. (The same is true for any type of resistance exertion.) You can't help contracting the arm muscles, but if you breathe out when you lift, you won't create the pressure in the chest cavity.

Second, and more importantly, start taking care of your body by getting regular exercise, including both aerobic exercise and weight training, losing weight, and getting your blood pressure and cholesterol under control. That's the real way to reduce your heart-attack risk.

If you do have to shovel snow, protect yourself by doing it properly. I want you around to achieve your dreams.

What are you prepared to do today?

***Dr. Chet***

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