

SHOVELLING

OVER ►

An injury resulting in a strain, sprain, torn muscle, tendon, ligament or joint is called a musculoskeletal injury (MSI). Manual material handling is one of the leading causes of strains and muscle soreness in the construction industry. Digging requires more repetitive bending than shovelling, but shovelling demands longer time in the same posture. The type of material being shovelled determines the type of shovel needed — most worksites use short-handled shovels, requiring excessive bending.

Shovelling

- >> Stand with feet apart and one foot ahead of the other — this improves stability.
- >> When done properly, shovelling is a rowing motion — allow your whole body to help, not just your arms and back.
- >> Push and pull instead of lifting whenever possible.
- >> Use your feet to face the direction you will throw the load — keeps you from twisting your back.
- >> Always skim off the top — never pick up more than 10 lbs with any shovel at one time.
- >> Work in a radius close to your body to avoid stretching and reaching while shovelling and digging.
- >> Select the right tool: flat blade for shovelling, round blade for digging.
- >> Take mini-breaks after every 20–30 minutes of continuous shovelling or digging.



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SHOVELLING

Hazards That May Result in an MSI

- Ground instability while shovelling or digging.
- Twisting your back when shovelling or digging.
- Lifting heavy loads with a shovel.
- Stretching to reach the material you are shovelling.
- Bending while shovelling or digging for long periods.
- Long periods of gripping the shovel handle.
- Continuous shovelling or digging without breaks.

Controls - Body Position & Technique

- Stand with feet apart and one foot ahead of the other — this improves stability.
- When done properly, shovelling is a rowing motion — use your whole body, not just your arms and back.
- Always move with the shovel, using your whole body to smoothly follow through in the shovelling motion.
- Push and pull instead of lifting whenever possible.
- Use your feet to face toward the direction you will throw the shovelled load — keeps you from twisting and lessens strain on your back.
- No matter what material you are shovelling, always try to "skim off the top" — do not pick up more than 10 lbs with any shovel at one time.
- Work in a radius close to your body to avoid stretching and reaching while shovelling and digging.
- The hand holding the shaft of the shovel should be held in a palm-up position.

Controls - Tool Selection

- Pay attention to the blade type, handle length and grip of the shovel you are using — always select the most appropriate tool for the job.
- When shovelling, select a tool with a flat blade; when digging, use a round shovel blade.
- Use a handle length that allows you to keep your back as straight as possible — this lessens the strain caused by excessive lifting.
- Adjust the handle size so that its diameter comfortably fits the size of your hand.

Controls - Work Pace & Breaks

- Take mini-breaks after 20–30 minutes of continuous shovelling or digging.
- Vary tasks where possible to avoid continuous repetitive motion.
- If you experience pain, stiffness or soreness, stop work and report to your supervisor immediately — early reporting prevents long-term injury.
- In cold conditions, warm up muscles before beginning heavy shovelling or digging tasks

Remember

- MSIs are among the most common and most preventable injuries on construction sites. Proper technique, the right tool, and regular breaks are your best defence.
- Employers must ensure workers are trained in safe manual material handling procedures per applicable