

SPRING GARDENING AND YARD WORK TIPS

With the weather finally feeling like spring, many people are beginning to head outside to get a start on making their yard the envy of the neighborhood. While getting enough physical activity is important for your overall health, there are times when those activities may cause a new or recurring injury to flare up. Follow these tips to avoid that happening to you when heading out to tackle your yard work!

1. **Warm Up** – As with any physical activity, taking a few minutes to warm up can go a long way in preventing injuries. Try to avoid static stretches before you are warmed up and instead focus more on a dynamic warm up.

A dynamic warm up may look something like this: a brisk 5-10 minute walk followed by trunk rotations (hands on your hips and twist side-to-side), side bends (hands on hips and bend side-to-side) and then knee-to-chest pulls (your knees don't need to touch your chest, just go as high as you can).

2. **Vary Your Activity** – Don't spend too much time on one activity. Do some raking, some pruning, some weeding, some digging, etc. But make sure to mix it up so you are not continuously doing one activity for too long.

3. **Weeding and Mowing** – Bending over for long periods of time causes a lot of strain in the low back. Bending over to weed and leaning forward on a push mower both can bother the low back. When weeding try to kneel on a rubber gardening mat, sit on a gardening stool or sit directly on the ground (also, see #2 to Vary Your Activity). When mowing, be aware of your posture and take breaks. There's no need to attempt to set a Guinness Record every time you mow!

4. **Hydrate** – Your body needs to be hydrated to function properly. Most often, this means water; only use an electrolyte drink if it is very hot out or you are working for several hours (but be careful, many of the electrolyte drinks have high fructose corn syrup, artificial sweeteners and artificial colors ... that is a topic for another time).

5. **Lifting** – Lift with your knees. This means keep your back straight and bend at the knees and hips (not your back) when lifting heavy – or even lighter – objects. Your legs and glute muscles are strong enough so let them do the heavy lifting! Your back will thank you.



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6. **Raking** – Most people have a dominant side and prefer to rake, shovel and sweep in that one direction. This causes imbalances in your body as one side is getting overworked. Try switching sides every few minutes. It will likely feel awkward at first but you'll get it!
7. **Wear Supportive Shoes** – Many people have crummy, worn out, old tennis or running shoes that they wear while doing yard work. Be careful. You want your shoes to have plenty of support and to fit properly.
8. **Outsource** – If you've had injuries in the past or are just not physically ready to do yard work, hire a niece, nephew, grandchild, neighborhood teenager, etc. It'll save you the pain of doing it yourself and put a few dollars in the pocket of a hardworking youngster.

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