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SPRING TUNE-UP

by Dr. Brian S. Seaman, DC, FCCSS(C), FICC



The snow has gone – and hopefully will not return (at least not in the near future)! So everyone knows what this means. Gardening season is here again and most people will spend a lot of time doing yard work (like raking up those leaves leftover from last Fall), preparing the garden beds for planting and start a general clean-up around the house. As well, the "handyman" type activities are also scheduled to be done, such as painting fences, pushing lawn mowers, trimming the hedge and weeding the garden.

These activities can take their toll on your back. Chiropractors treat many gardening enthusiasts and handy type people who injure themselves every Spring. Many of you may read this and think "been there, done that!".

It is important, that you do not take on too much, too soon. Be sure to organize your day and list the tasks which you would like to accomplish. HINT: Figure out how much time you think it will take to do these tasks – then double it. You will find that the larger time frame is likely more accurate.

Start off with some of the smaller and less physically demanding jobs around the house and yard. You may find it better to start an easy fitness program; perhaps even start taking a brisk walk every day. Be sure to improve your physical condition before you take on too much around the house and garden. Gentle stretching exercises before, during and after physically demanding work, are recommended.

Be sure not to remain bent over or stooped for too long. This fatigues the muscles in your back and can cause back pain or pre-dispose you to an injury. This is a position that your back is not used to and it will tell you so. After being bent forward for a long period of time be sure to stand up straight and arch backwards to ease the strain on your back. Being bent over for a long period of time is very similar to holding your arm out to the side for an equally long time. As you all know, your shoulder muscles will get tired, and you will likely experience some pain or discomfort in the muscle. That is a sign that the muscle is fatigued.

When you are outside, be sure to wear proper clothing. Don't overdress or under-dress for the weather. It is generally best to dress in layers. It is also important to wear proper footwear. Make sure your feet stay dry (especially in the muddy garden in the early Spring) and also make sure that the old shoes (which most of us use in the garden) do provide proper support. Hint: Keep an extra pair of dry socks handy.

Many of the gardening tools are now made with longer handles, and they can be purchased with thicker handles covered with foam. Hint: If you have a shovel or gardening tool which is still in good shape, but due to arthritis you find it hard to grip, just buy some tubular foam which is used as insulation around water pipes. This can be taped on to your garden tools and should make gripping much easier.

When you are weeding the garden, it is best to be down on "all fours" or kneel, using one knee at a time and changing positions frequently. Knee pads, or an old piece of foam will help to reduce the pressure on your knees.

When lifting or shoveling, be sure to use your legs to take the strain; do not strain your back! Switch hands frequently when you are raking, hoeing or shoveling. This helps to reduce the strain on one side of the body.

Early in the gardening season, it is not uncommon for people to experience joint or muscle soreness. Rest the area (don't try to complete all the tasks which you had scheduled for the day) and relax with an ice pack. Ice packs placed on the area (with a cloth on top of the skin) for 10-15 minutes (every couple of hours) is often quite beneficial.

If you sustain a significant injury to your back or neck, be sure to consult with your chiropractor. Do not be one of those people who suffers needlessly by telling themselves it will be better in a few days. Our gardening season is only so long! How many times have you heard your friends say "I thought it would go away". Don't be one of them. Be smart. Be kind to your back!

Enjoy your gardening season.

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