

GARDENING FOR HEALTH

Spring is in the air! The birds are singing happily, building nests. Along with the sheer joy of being in nature, comes the demanding and somewhat strenuous labor of yard work and gardening. Raking, digging and planting require good flexibility and strength. Be sure you're ready for the job by preparing yourself physically and mentally. Check with your medical professional if you are currently suffering from a musculoskeletal or cardiovascular disorder or other health conditions that may prevent you from exerting yourself fully.

Here are some tips to help you prevent injury and stay well during your spring clean-up:

- * **HYDRATE** - Drinking water frequently is very important to supply our muscles and tissues with the oxygen and lubrication needed to function well. If you don't like water, try adding a little lemon or fruit juice to it. Soda is not recommended as this depletes the body of important nutrients.
- * **PROTECT** - Wear sunscreen, a hat, and gardening gloves to protect your skin from the sun and cuts. If you have a pre-existing injury such as a sprain or strain, wear a brace or splint to support and protect the area from further injury.
- * **BREATHE** - Taking deep breaths from your diaphragm will relieve cardiovascular stress and improve endurance. Avoid holding your breath when straining or lifting. Blow out/exhale as you exert a force and inhale through your nose on the relaxation part of the activity.
- * **STRETCH** - Take regular breaks to stretch and change positions. If you're normally tight, remember to stretch your major muscles in your arms and legs and back before and after any strenuous activity or prolonged position.
 - Backbend if you are stooped or bent forward for awhile.
 - Flex forward reaching towards your toes if you've been reaching up or standing for awhile.
- * **ADAPT** - If you have difficulty kneeling or standing up from the ground level, using a stool or garden scooter is a great way to get around this challenge.
- * **SUPPORT YOUR BACK** - Whenever possible stand with your feet spread apart wide for a good base of support and to ease the pressure off of your back.
 - Work at waist level whenever possible.
 - Remember to tighten your core/abdominal muscles while digging, lifting or pulling (NOT holding your breath) by pulling inwards from your naval.
 - Use the larger muscles of the legs, bending from the hips and knees, NOT your waist.
 - Change positions slowly.
- * **LISTEN TO YOUR BODY** - Do not push through pain! It is your body's way of asking you to stop what you are doing. If you observe and listen to your body in the moment, you will be less likely to suffer more severe pain or injury later.
- * **REST** - Get out of the sun, relax and sit for a while or lie in the grass under a tree and admire your work!

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