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"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"

Getting Back into Gardening

The flowers are blooming and the vegetables are growing. The season of gardening is now in full swing. But how is your back coping with all this bending, shoveling, and lifting?

Today, I will give you a few tips on how to prevent your back from becoming a painful problem that will keep you out of the garden.

Give your muscles a chance to warm up before working in the yard or garden. Practice stretching with the various movements you will be performing while working in the yard. Better yet, take a ten to fifteen-minute walk around the block before starting.

Avoid prolonged bending, pushing, and pulling while raking and hoeing. This can strain the shoulders, neck, and lower back. Also, when raking or hoeing, most people prefer to pull or push to one side of their body depending if they are left or right handed. It is much less likely to cause repetitive strain injuries if you switch back and forth.

When using a weed eater, use short rather than long side to side motions. Long side-to-side strokes cause excessive rotation in your back. Ideally, use a weed eater that has a double shoulder strap to disperse the weight of the machine equally over your shoulders and upper back. Without a good strap, the weight is isolated to the forearms (causing tennis elbow) or one shoulder (causing neck stiffness).

Carry medium-to-small sized loads of debris close to your body, or use a wheelbarrow to avoid strain on your back. Save heavier work for mid-way through your chores. This helps avoid sudden strenuous exertion on unused muscles and joints.

Keep overhead work to five-minute episodes. Avoid extreme reaching with one arm.

Kneel to perform tasks on the ground, rather than bending over. To prevent knee problems, use a dense foam "gardening pad" to kneel on.

Finally, stretch your low back before and after the job is finished! Ideally, you should be doing low back stretches and exercises two to three times per week. If you do not know how, log onto our website (www.merrittchiro.com) and look for the “free stretches and exercises” section for the low back. Otherwise, contact me at my office for a photocopy.