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

Your Back and Spring Yard Tasks

I am sure you have heard of the saying, "with the good comes the bad". I am referring to the fact that spring break often marks the beginning of more consistent sunshine and warmer temperatures. But, with this comes the burden of commencing all those yard and garden tasks.

Grudgingly or enthusiastically, you will sooner or later be out there conquering these tasks. However, what you have forgotten is that most of you have not done this type of physical work since you put the lawn mower and shovel away last fall. This means that your body is not accustomed to tackling these kinds of jobs.

On the Monday after this year's spring break, our phone rang off the hook with people who had acute low back pain after a weekend of "just working in the yard". They could not understand why their low back suddenly became so sore. I explained to them that it was likely because they just spent the entire last few days performing garden and yard-related tasks with poor technique or incorrect posture and for too long at one time. The weight of the grass clippings, leaves, pine needles, weeds, and dirt was not the real problem. The most common cause of the low back pain in their scenario was either the repetitive twisting/bending motion or simply remaining bent over in one position for too long.

Your low back is not designed to perform activities like this for prolonged periods of time. In some cases, your back can become acutely sore in almost seconds. However, in most instances, the pain doesn't usually become severe until some time later. At first, you may only feel a warmth, weakness, or dull ache. Then, after relaxing on the couch for a couple of well deserved hours or perhaps even after sleeping that night, you can wake up in excruciating pain. While you are relaxing or sleeping, inflammation can accumulate in and around the now very stiff joints, which irritates the spinal nerves as they exit the spine. These nerves control the large muscles of the back, resulting in acute muscle spasms and pain that can travel down to the leg or buttocks (called "sciatica").

If you are unfortunate enough to have this happen to you, simply taking medication to relieve the pain, inflammation, and muscle spasm is not the answer. If

your back had good mobility in the joints and flexibility in the muscles in the first place, you would likely not be in acute pain at all. When finding a solution to your problem, you should be thinking beyond just getting rid of the pain. You should be seeking out a treatment that will restore the mobility to the affected joints and increase the flexibility of the muscles. This way, you can prevent it from happening again or even at all. The best and most commonly treatment used to accomplish this is “manipulation” (commonly known as an “adjustment” and specifically done by chiropractors). By restoring the mobility in the inflamed and sore joints, the swelling can be flushed out, the circulation inside the joint is improved, and the joints heal naturally and on their own. Then, it is your responsibility to follow through with the exercises and stretching that your chiropractor recommends so that your back remains healthy.

Of course, the best cure for low back pain is prevention. When you are raking, keep your back straight and pull the rake directly towards your body. Do not pull the rake to your side, as this will automatically encourage your back to twist. If you are shoveling, keep your back straight and do not rotate it in order to throw the dirt. If you are weeding, do not remain bent over for long periods of time. Get up and move around every twenty minutes or so. As well, do not try to accomplish all of the jobs in one weekend. Spread the chores out over the entire month. Most importantly, see your chiropractor regularly so he or she can help you to maintain good joint mobility and muscle flexibility.