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

Ten Tips for Summer

Getting into gardening, yard work and warm weather activities like golf doesn't have to be a pain in the back if you take a few simple precautions. This week, I am offering some easy tips to get into the swing of summer without taking a toll on your back.

Now that the warm weather has finally arrived, people are eager to get outdoors and many of us tend to overdo it – especially on the weekends. That usually leads to a sore back and a lot of very stiff people showing up at my office on Monday mornings. The good news is that it's mostly preventable. Taking a few simple steps will give your back a break and won't slow you down. In fact, it may even improve your performance in the yard or on the green."

The following ten tips to give your back a break this summer – and all year round.

1. Take It Slow

Many of us are more sedentary during the winter months and lose flexibility and muscle tone. So, take it slow when starting-up summer activities. Try nine holes of golf instead of 18 the first couple times out, and resist attempting to complete that huge yard task in one day.

2. Stretch-Out

Warm-up your muscles with five to ten minutes of gentle, slow stretching exercises to help prevent injuries and strains on muscles and joints before heading out for the garden or sports field.

3. Take a Break

When working in the yard, alternate tasks and positions, and take three brief breaks every hour. Do the same for sports activities and stretch-out frequently.

4. Lift It Right

When lifting, keep your back straight and bend your knees. Lift with your legs not your back whether you're unloading sports equipment or moving potting soil.

5. Hydrate

Drink plenty of fluids before, during and after physical activity - especially during warm weather.

6. The Right Moves

In the garden, kneel to plant items and pull weeds. Rake with one leg in front and the other behind. Use tools that are a comfortable weight and size for you. The same goes for sports activities. Make sure your equipment is sized correctly for you and learn good technique whether it's swinging a golf club, kicking a soccer ball or cycling. Use a double strap versus a single strap for carrying a golf bag on your shoulder.

7. Wear Protective Gear

Wear a helmet when cycling, rollerblading or skateboarding and don't forget wrist, elbow and knee guards - there's more than your back at stake. A hat, sunscreen and breaks in the shade will also help prevent overexposure to the sun's rays and its heat.

8. Good Footwear Reduces Wear and Tear

Wear comfortable supportive shoes appropriate for your activity to avoid slipping, twisting and sliding that can injure your back.

9. Stretch-Out Before You Wrap-Up

Before you call it a day, stretch-out your back and leg muscles to help prevent tightness and soreness.

10. Sleep on Your Back or Side

Sleeping on your stomach can prompt back and neck pain - not what you want after an active day outside. A supportive mattress will also give your back a break.

Despite the best preventive efforts, some people will still end-up with stiffness and soreness. Studies show that unless the condition is severe, you're better off seeing a chiropractor and returning to light to moderate physical activity after taking it easy for a day or two. In fact, the sooner you begin to move, the faster your recovery will be.