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

Gardening Season Is Upon Us!

As with most homeowners, the spring and summer weather signifies that it is time for yard work. This may include weeding, planting flowers, or getting the garden started. In our office, this also signifies something. It is the onset of influx of people who have worked too long and hard in their yard, resulting in a sore back. This week, we will discuss how to shovel and use a wheelbarrow properly.

One gardening activity that often results in back pain is shoveling. This activity requires repetitive bending and twisting of the back, while lifting a shovel full of material. The lower back is generally a strong and stable part of the body. However, when used improperly, it will not perform well. When shoveling, both feet should be planted firmly and the pelvis should be facing wherever the shovel is digging. When a person digs at an angle or at the side of their body, this puts the back in a vulnerable twisted position. This is especially true when a person is digging in front of themselves and then twists to throw the dirt to a different spot. Doing this for a long period of time is really a bad idea! If a person has to move dirt from one spot to another, they should dig in front of and then his or her feet and pelvis to face the spot where the dirt is to be deposited. This prevents the back from twisting at all and keeps in a safe position. In addition to not twisting the back, keeping it straight is just as important. Imagine sitting up straight in a flat back chair. This is the same position that the back should be in when doing any lifting or bending. Just remember to keep a small shallow concave curve in the low back. When this curve reverses or becomes convex, the back is in a vulnerable position.

When using a wheelbarrow, the same rules apply. The back should remain straight when lifting and pushing a wheelbarrow and be sure not to twist the back. Do not fill the wheelbarrow completely full, as it will be "tipsy". If the wheelbarrow is in the process of tipping and a person tries hard to prevent it, this is a prime situation for a back injury to occur.

Keep these tips in mind when doing your spring and summer yard tasks. As much as I like correcting my patient's low back injuries, I still feel that preventing an injury from happening in the first place is much better than trying to treat it after the fact.