

# Dr. Colin Gage

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

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## Spring Gardening and A Healthy Back

I know that I have discussed this topic numerous times in the past years, but marketing researchers say that for a person to really take note of an ad or message, it has to be exposed to them at least four times. I am not sure this is the fourth time I have covered this topic, but you get the point!

More than all other spring activities, doing yard work and gardening are by far the most common causes of people coming into my office with acute low back pain. Unfortunately, too many people are not as active in the winter months as they are in the spring and summer months. Thus, over the more sedentary winter period, the average person's muscles weaken and become tight or shortened. As well, their joints, such as in their low back, become mildly stiff or slightly restricted in their motion.

Then, spring arrives and people get all excited to get out into their yards in order to accomplish all of those spring yard tasks as soon as possible. It's almost as if they think that the sooner their yard is all tidy and flowers are planted, the sooner summer will arrive! However, this sudden dramatic increase of physical activity combined with weak/shortened muscles and stiff/tight joints is a recipe for disaster.

To prevent your back from a spring statistic, take note of the following mnemonic device: "HEALTHY BACKS".

**H**ave the right tools for the task at hand  
**E**nsure you drink plenty of fluids  
**A**lternate between light and heavy jobs  
**L**ift correctly  
**T**ake frequent breaks  
**H**heavy loads should be shared  
**Y**our feet should be protected with thick soled supportive shoes  
**B**efore you start, warm-up your muscles  
**A**void muscle strain, learn the right techniques  
**C**hange positions frequently  
**K**neel to plant and weed

Spinal check-ups by a chiropractor can help keep your back healthy. Even a mildly tight back can be very vulnerable to an acute flare up after a day of yardwork.