

Healthy Living

Patient Information from the American Chiropractic Association

Get in Shape to Tackle Your Yard

Before you rev up the lawnmower or reach for your rake, consider the possible consequences: back strain, neck strain and pain in the shoulders.

Just as playing football or golf can injure your body, the twisting, turning, bending, and reaching of mowing and raking can also cause injury if your body is not prepared. Like an athlete, if you leap into something without warming up, the chances of injury are greater.

Tips to Avoid Injury

The American Chiropractic Association (ACA) and your local doctor of chiropractic offer the following tips to help prevent the needless pain yard work may cause.

- Do stretching exercises, without bouncing, for 10 to 15 minutes during the course of your work. Do knee-to-chest pulls, trunk rotations, and side bends with hands above your head and fingers locked. Take a short walk to stimulate circulation. When finished, repeat the stretching exercises.
- Stand as straight as possible, and keep your head up as you rake or mow.
- When it's still warm outside, avoid the heat. If you're a morning person, get the work done before 10 a.m. Otherwise, do your chores after 6 p.m.
- When raking, use a 'scissors' stance: right foot forward and left foot back, reverse after a few minutes, putting your left foot forward and right foot back.

- Bend at the knees, not the waist, as you pick up piles of leaves or grass from the grass catcher. Make the piles small to decrease the possibility of back strain.
- When mowing, use your whole bodyweight to push the mower, rather than just your arms and back.
- If your mower has a pull cord, don't twist at the waist or yank the cord. Instead, bend at the knees and pull in one smooth motion.
- Drink lots of water, and wear protective gear, such as a hat, long pants and gloves. If your equipment is loud, wear hearing protection. If you have asthma or allergies, wear a mask.
- Try ergonomic tools. They're engineered to protect you when used properly.

If you do feel soreness or stiffness in your back, use ice to soothe the discomfort. If there's no improvement in two or three days, see your doctor of chiropractic. ■

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