

HOW TO PREVENT GARDENER'S BACK

With gardening season in full swing, many eager "green thumbs" find themselves unexpectedly nursing back pain. *Gardener's back* can largely be avoided if the following simple "golden rules" are heeded:

- Give your body adequate time to "loosen up" in the morning before *any* physical work or stretching. Avoid prolonged or repetitive bending or stooping for the first few hours of the morning, as this has been shown to significantly increase the incidence of back pain.
- Walk for a few minutes, then do some gentle back and leg stretches before you start gardening.
- Bend over for short periods of time only. When bending over, keep the knees bent, or better still, kneel.
- Take frequent breaks. Gently and regularly stretch the opposite way to how you have been working.
- Lift only very comfortable loads. As your back gets tired, the chance of injury increases, so lighten your load significantly.
- Lift correctly: bend knees (not your back), hug the load and don't twist. Lift slowly and lift carefully. When using a wheelbarrow, make sure the load is as far forward as possible, and equally balanced.
- If you are shoveling, raking or hoeing, change sides often and take frequent breaks. Hold the shovel with your hands far apart, keep knees bent, back straight, and minimize any unnecessary twisting, torquing or over-reaching.
- Use correct tools. When using a weed-eater, use a shoulder strap across the chest.
- Whenever possible, push rather than pull.
- As a preventative measure against unnecessary back strains or injury, regular chiropractic checkups will help to ensure your spine and associated muscles are functioning optimally. Your chiropractor can also guide you in the best exercises to keep your back strong and flexible.

Dr. Sharon Wagener DeWolf is the owner of Redmond Back & Neck Pain Clinic. For more information, contact (425)885-9950.

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