

SMART tips for pain-free gardening

Tuesday June 10 2008

The early morning frosts have come to an end and your gardens are begging for attention. Getting back into spring and summer activities doesn't have to be a pain in the back. You can enjoy a healthy and active gardening season without pain and discomfort by taking the SMART approach.

Stretch before, during and after activities

Stretching helps you to move easily, keeps your muscles flexible, your joints mobile and relieves tension. Movements should be slow, controlled and held for 15 seconds. Repeat stretches two to three times. Breathe deeply; do not bounce or jerk.

Move today for tomorrow

Gardening is a great way to get your body moving. Work in a comfortable posture.

Keep your work in front of you and close to your body. Lift with your knees bent and back straight. Rake with one leg in front of the other. Minimize reaching and twisting.

Add it up

Add up all of your physical activities in a day and aim for a minimum of 60 minutes of movement every day. Your body can only perform at the level of effort and endurance to which it is accustomed — be realistic! Work within your limits of physical strength. Pace yourself and take breaks. Rotate tasks to avoid overuse injuries.

Reduce strain

Fit the tools to you. Gardening tools and equipment are meant to make the work easier.

Keep your tools within reach (consider using an apron with pockets). Use tools to reduce work (wheelbarrows, extended handles and good grips).

Talk to a physiotherapist

Physiotherapists are health care professionals who help people of all ages and lifestyles gain and maintain their desired level of active living and physical mobility. With their applied knowledge and understanding of the human body in action, physiotherapists are able to help you increase your mobility, relieve pain, build strength and improve balance and cardiovascular function. Physiotherapists not only treat injuries, they also teach you how to prevent the onset of pain or injury that can limit your activity.

Headwaters Health Care Centre's rehabilitation department accepts referrals from physicians for outpatient rehabilitation for specific arthritis concerns, orthopaedic assessment and treatment, acute injuries clinic and neurological rehabilitation. For more information, or if you have a referral from your physician, contact the rehabilitation department at 519-941-2702, ext. 2220.

Sandy Critchley is a staff physiotherapist at Headwaters Health Care Centre.

Your Health Matters is a column dealing with health and healthy lifestyles, and is submitted by various health-related organizations.