

Fall is here!

As the weather gets colder, the leaves are falling and children are already talking about Santa Claus, many of us will officially be bidding summer goodbye. While we are doing yard work and cleaning inside, our neuro-musculo-skeletal system is often overworked. Preparing for the cold season is no small task!

DOING TOO MUCH, TOO FAST

We don't get ready for winter by quietly sitting on our couch. We lift, we rake, we scrub, we fill, we carry,... We move!

If we aren't careful with how we move, we can injure our spine which can lead to low-back pain, herniated discs, sprains and strains,... These injuries can be the result of a false movement but also when we try to do too much, too fast. Here's a quick tip: start early and spread out the work to be done over a few weeks, rather than trying to get it all done in one Sunday afternoon.

PROPERLY DOING THE MOST COMMON TASKS

1. Raking the leaves...

Raking the yard is excellent physical activity that is often very demanding on our body. To avoid injuries, it's important to choose the proper tool. Opt for a rake with a handle that is long enough to avoid working bent over. To minimize the effort for your arms and to make it easier on you, pick a rake with flexible blades spread out in a fan. Finally, to reduce tension on your back, place one leg in front of the other and alternate occasionally. Ideally, don't rake following rain as the leaves will be heavier and therefore will increase the degree of difficulty. And always avoid twisting your body!

2. ...and picking them up!

The lucky ones will be using their lawnmowers for this part, by adapting the blades to the appropriate level. The others will ideally perform this task with a buddy, one holding the bag at hip level, the other bending over repeatedly while keeping the back straight and dropping the leaves into the bag.

3. Piling wood

Bending your knees while keeping the back straight is that much more important when you are piling wood. Coordinate your movements and always keep the load close to you. Avoid "lazy trips". Frequent smaller trips are better than fewer large ones. Use a cart if possible, which will save you time and hassle.

4. Closing the garden

Working in the garden usually entails kneeling on the ground. Reduce tension by using a cushion for your knees. Keep your back straight and take frequent breaks. Get up regularly to relax your muscles and joints, and do the work progressively.

5. Moving heavy objects

Fall is also the time to put away the hoses, close the pool and pack up the BBQ. These activities require lifting and carrying heavy objects. It's important to respect some ground rules to lift this objects safely.

First, bring the object close to you and put your legs shoulder-width apart. Your feet and nose should point in the direction of the object to lift. With your knees bent and your back straight, use your leg and arms muscles to lift while keeping the object close to you. To set the object down, bend your knees and control the descent.

6. Taking out the winter clothes

If your winter gear is tucked away on a high shelf, use a step ladder rather than reaching up to get it. And same goes with putting away your summer clothes: avoid lifting boxes above your waist.

PRACTICAL TIPS

- No matter which task you want to achieve, never go beyond arm's length in your movements. Whether it's trimming your trees, raking your leaves or washing your exterior walls, always respect this rule. Reaching beyond this point is automatically asking too much from your spine. In the long run, you will gain nothing and risk injury.
- Work as a team as much as possible.
- Don't forget to warm up before you get to work, and stretch your muscles and joints once your tasks are completed.
- You got the gloves and scarves out to work outside? This doesn't prevent dehydration! Keep a water bottle handy and drink every 15 minutes.

Sources :

Association des chiropraticiens du Québec
Canadian Chiropractic Association