

Keep the “spring” in spring cleaning

Finally spring and warm weather are back! Daylight is more present and the sunrays are showing all the dust on your furniture; its spring cleaning time! For many, this annual ritual is good for the soul but in many cases causes problems because of a sudden increase in activity. A great deal of us have spent the cold winter months in a hibernating state, and end up doing too much too fast once we start moving.

Spring cleaning is physically demanding work. Before starting, it's important to warm up and stretch your muscles to reduce the risk of injury. Making large circles with your arms and walking in place are great exercises to get ready to scrub. It's a good idea to focus on the shoulders, especially if you will be doing chores that require your arms to be elevated (washing windows, walls even ceilings). It's not rare to see people develop shoulder pain that goes down the arm following an intense day of cleaning.

Washing floors

A mop soaked with water can weigh up to 25 lbs! To avoid back pain, follow these tips.

- Hold the mop by switching up the hands.
- Keep your back straight.
- Avoid extreme movements of the wrists.
- Use your legs to generate strength and balance your weight from left to right.
- Keep your arms close and elbows tucked in to stabilize your shoulders.
- Avoid reaching left or right.
- Remember that it's often easier on the back to wash the floor on your hands and knees.

Vacuuming

Vacuuming is an activity that can cause discomfort in the back, neck and shoulders because of the repetitive motions. For this reason, it's even more important to move properly.

- Keep your elbows tucked in to protect the shoulders.
- Avoid bringing your elbows behind your back.
- Hold the extension cord so that your hand and forearm are level.
- Keep your back straight and avoid bending forward.
- Use both hands, one to pull and the other to push.
- Take a few steps forward then a few steps back.
- Ask for help to move furniture.

Scrubbing

Avoid squatting for long periods of time as this puts a great deal of stress on the ligaments and cartilage in your knees. Try kneeling one knee at a time on a cushion or kneepads and switch sides often. If possible, work sitting down.

Ladders

Many spring cleaning tasks involve the use of a stepladder or ladder, such as washing ceilings, cutting branches and moving objects on high shelves. Keep in mind that your hands shouldn't go above your shoulders. Choose the proper size of ladder for the job and make sure it's in good working order (no broken rungs, no loose screws,..). Place it on a firm and stable surface and avoid reaching over; move the ladder as necessary. Don't use a ladder if you have balance problems or are taking medication that may affect you.

It's best to regularly vary the tasks in order to use different muscles. For example, you may wash the walls then. You will accomplish as much but will feel better, less tired and less achy. By using proper movements and by using your legs and arms rather than your back, spring cleaning won't be a menace to your joints. Turn your music up, open the windows and sing at the top of your lungs. Have fun scrubbing!