



Gardening Tips to Protect Your Joints

By Shannon Calenberg, PT, DPT

Gardening season is upon us! Unfortunately for some, this means aching backs, knees, and other joints due to overuse and prolonged, repetitive postures. This article will provide tips to avoid common aches and pains this season!

Tip #1

Avoid Repetitive Bending. Instead of bending, try squatting down or using a lunge to get down into position. Bending puts a large amount of pressure in the intervertebral discs of the spine, and performing this repetitively can create inflammation in the discs and joints of the spine, even leading to tears of the annular fibers (outer layers) of the disc. Another option is using a kneeling pad or bench for prolonged work at ground level. This can ease pressure through the knees, and protect your spine.

Tip #2

Take Frequent Breaks. Staying in one position for too long can cause strain on muscles and decreased blood flow to joints and muscles, leading to pain after the activity has ceased. It's important to change positions frequently. If sitting for a long duration, try to get up and stand or walk a short distance every half hour to alleviate strain on the spine and keep the limbs limber as well as increasing blood flow to joints and muscles.

Tip #3

Use your core. During activities, it's important to protect your spine with core muscle activation. To contract the deepest layer of muscle (transverse abdominis), that is your natural corset, think of pulling your stomach in toward your spine. Keeping this muscle engaged can protect your spine from shear forces that lead to joint sprains, muscle

strains, and disc pathologies. While you are shoveling, raking, or lifting, consider using this muscle to stabilize and protect your back!

Tip #4

Hydrate. Every cell in our body requires a certain amount of water to maintain homeostasis and allow systems to function properly. Due to the water loss that occurs with activity through sweating and breathing, drinking water to replenish is vital. Some consequences of dehydration include muscle cramping, fatigue, headache, nausea, fainting, and headache to name a few.

Tip# 5

Stretch. Stretching provides blood flow to the muscle tissue and promotes extensibility which can decrease the risk of muscle damage during activities. It's important to stretch before AND after strenuous activity. Stretch before to prepare your body for the activity and after to restore blood flow and decrease risks of cramping.



Shannon Calenberg, PT, DPT works at Stevensville Physical Therapy, downtown in the Wellness Center. Call today for an appointment, 777.5354.