



Moore Health Physiotherapy Explains: Safe Gardening

So you've planned a big day in the garden? The lawn needs mowing, the shrubs want cutting back, the weeds are out of control (again!) and there's a pile of mulch sitting in the front yard waiting to be spread. Even if you're keen, don't just jump in and get busy! Gardening and DIY around the home often requires a broad range of physical motion such as bending, lifting, stretching and pushing — and yet we don't often stop to think about how much effort we are demanding of our bodies when we do work around the house. As with any exercise, if our bodies aren't adequately prepared to do our gardening and DIY jobs, then injuries can occur

Common Gardening and DIY Injuries

About 1 in 5 DIY injuries occur in the garden (Better Health Channel, 2008). Back injuries and overuse/accumulative injuries are amongst the most common injuries sustained by gardeners and DIY'ers. When doing gardening, renovating or repairing work, your current physical condition will have a significant impact on the likelihood of sustaining a non-accident related injury. So 'weekend warriors' should beware: going too hard and too long can definitely increase your chance of incurring a gardening or DIY-related injury!

Simple Precautions for Preventing Injury

Preventing injuries in the garden involves more than just reading the safety instructions on our power tools and using the correct protective gear. As with any form of exercise, it is important to make certain that our bodies are prepared to perform the functions that our gardening and DIY activities will demand from it.

- **Warm Up:** Remember that gardening and DIY is often hard physical work. Whatever your gardening and/or DIY plans happen to be, it is very important to give your body a chance to warm up before you commence working. After you've slapped on your sun block, a five to ten minute warm up followed up by some stretching exercises will make a big difference to your potential post-gardening aches and pains.
- **Recognising your limits:** is a key step in avoiding injury. Seek assistance to move heavy objects (such as pots and building materials), take regular breaks throughout the day, avoid overloading the wheelbarrow and *admit* when you are tired!
- **Use the Right Tool for the Job:** The sensible and safe use of well-designed tools can greatly decrease the risk of injury. Look for equipment that suits your height and build to help prevent back pain. Remember that lighter, long handled tools can reduce the need to bend and give you more leverage. It is better to pay a bit more for the right tool than to pay for days, weeks or months in pain!
- **Change Position Regularly:** Many gardening and DIY activities (such as weeding, digging, painting and hammering) involve staying in the same position and or doing repetitive movements for an extended period of time. This places significant strain on your body. So make sure you give those working muscle groups regular breaks and change position and or take a short rest every 15-20 minutes. Stretching in the opposite direction from the way that you have been bending will help gently stretch those muscles.
- **Consider Raised Garden Beds:** If you suffer from chronic back pain (or just want to avoid having a sore back later) consider installing raised garden beds. A garden bed height of between 60 and 90 cm (2 to 3 feet) should eliminate much of the need to bend, and bed widths of about 120 cm (4 feet) will allow you to comfortably access the entire garden without too much stretching.
- **Lift and Carry Safely:** If you have a heavy object to move, it is essential to remember correct lifting techniques.
 - 1) Before lifting, get a firm footing by standing with feet apart.
 - 2) Bend at the knees and hips then grip the object firmly, keep the load close to your body, brace your spine and keep your back straight.
 - 3) Lift smoothly, avoiding jerking or twisting.