

Healthy Living

Patient Information from the American Chiropractic Association

Tips to Make Yard Work Pain Free

The equipment available today for lawn and leaf management can help turn the average homeowner into a lawn specialist overnight. But the use of weed trimmers, leaf blowers and hedge clippers has also been sending aspiring landscapers to their local doctor of chiropractic.

The American Chiropractic Association (ACA) warns that using this equipment can result in back and neck pain, as well as more serious muscular strains and tears if not used properly. “The repetitive motion that your body undergoes when using such equipment can bring on a whole host of mechanical problems within the body,” says Dr. Jerome McAndrews, a longtime ACA member.

Safely Using Outdoor Equipment

Dr. McAndrews offers the following tips to help you enjoy a safe, productive day in the yard:

- Regardless of what piece of equipment you are using, make sure it has a strap—and that you use it. Place the strap over your head on the shoulder on the opposite side of your body from the device. This will help normalize your center of gravity.
- Be sure to switch the side on which you are operating the equipment as often as possible, and to balance the muscles being used, alternate your stance and motion frequently.
- Take frequent breaks.
- Consider electric-powered items, especially if you experience back or neck pain, as they tend to be lighter than their engine-powered counterparts.
- When picking up or putting down your equipment, be sure to bend from the knees, not at the waist. Keep the object close to your body as you lift, not at arm’s length.

“While it is critical that you operate your yard equipment safely, it is equally important that you prepare your body for the work you are about to do,” explains Dr.

McAndrews. “To help avoid injury, be sure to include a warm-up/cool-down period that involves stretching.”

Simple Stretches

Before stretching, there are a few tips to keep in mind. Breathe in and out slowly throughout each stretching exercise until the muscle is stretched to its furthest point. At that point, hold your breath in. When you relax, breathe out. Stretch gently and smoothly. Do not bounce or jerk your body in any way and stretch as far as you can comfortably. You should not feel pain.

Following are stretches Dr. McAndrews recommends for getting the most out of the time you spend in the yard:

- Stand up and prop your heel on a back door step or stool with your knee slightly bent. Bend forward until you feel a slight pull at the back of the thigh, called the hamstring. You may need to stabilize yourself by holding onto a garage door handle. Hold the position for 20 seconds, then relax. Do it once more, then repeat with the other leg.
- Stand up and put your right hand against a wall or other stable surface. Bend your left knee and grab your ankle with your left hand. Pull your heel toward your buttocks to stretch the quadricep muscle at the front of your thigh. Hold the position for 20 seconds, relax and do it again. Repeat with the other leg.
- Weave your fingers together above your head with your palms up. Lean to one side for 10 seconds to stretch the side of your upper body, then reverse. Repeat two or three times.
- “Hug your best friend”: Wrap your arms around yourself after letting your breath out and rotate to one side, as far as you can go. Hold it for 10 seconds. Then reverse. Repeat two or three times.

If you experience pain or discomfort resulting from yard work, call your local doctor of chiropractic. ■