

SAFE

GARDENING & North East Physiotherapy



Stay Safe While Gardening: Some Tips

Spring has sprung, so there's a fair chance that you'll be putting in some long hours in the garden in the next few weeks, if you haven't already. Remember, gardening can be a vigorous activity performed over sustained periods. In this way it is akin to sport and many of the same principals apply. Sport is all about safety and performance.....so is gardening.

Before you start thinking about what to plant and where, make sure you're thinking safety, as well.

Here are some tips to make sure you minimise the risk of injury & incapacity:

- Be realistic about what you can do. Age and physical fitness are important factors. If you have a long-term injury or condition that affects your movement, get it checked out by a physiotherapist.
- Avoid fatigue by taking frequent breaks and keeping yourself well hydrated. This lowers the risks of a soft tissue strain
- Be realistic about tackling large tasks in a single day.
- Maintain your garden equipment. Clean, sturdy, sharp tools can make all the difference in making gardening easier and safer.
- Choose the right tools for the job and find your "easy zone", which is a comfortable position to work in. Use the tools to assist you as you move with your work.
- Know how to use your equipment properly. The proper use of garden tools is essential for safety and to avoid strain.
- When using long-handle tools, such as a rake or shovel, try to keep your back straight by bending and straightening your knees more.
- Grip your tools lightly when working to avoid injury.
- Choose tools that have comfortable grips. Fortunately, there are new lines of tools that aid in making gardening work easier and safer. Many tools are now made with fibreglass, instead of wood, which cuts down on the weight of the tool, keeping exertion to a minimum.
- Where practical, use longer-handled tools to give better leverage and avoid having to stoop and twist.



- Consider using a garden stool, or kneeling.
- Keep commonly used tools at hand, which avoids constant rising and squatting, as well as continual trips to the shed.
- Rotate the tasks to avoid staying in one position too long.
- Always consider using the most labour-saving, mechanized devices that are practical for the job.
- Wear the proper clothing, which should allow comfortable full range movement. You don't want to be straining against your clothes as well as a barrow-load of dirt!

Manual handling of shovels

One of the most common gardening tasks that often results in injury is shovelling. To make shovelling safer:

- Ensure that the shovel's head is perpendicular to the ground when you are pushing in with your foot.
- If you cannot push with one foot, don't attempt jumping onto the shovel with both feet to drive the tip in. If the ground is this hard, you'll need a crowbar, mattock or even a backhoe for the job.
- When lifting dirt out of the hole, don't grip close to the bottom of the shovel or too far at the end of the handle, because this causes strain on your back. Grip in the middle and on the end of the handle to lever the dirt out.
- Don't attempt to use your shovel as a crowbar if you encounter roots. Use the tip of the shovel as a chopping tool and cut cleanly through the root by turning the shovel around.
- As with any other gardening task, always keep your back as straight as possible.
- Be Sun Smart. Slip on a shirt, Slop on the sunscreen, Slap on a hat and try to avoid gardening during the noon –3:00 pm period.

How can physiotherapy help?

- Remember, don't take chances with your physical capacity: If you're carrying an injury, get it sorted out by a physiotherapist, so you know what you can do safely.

With these tips in mind, gardening should be much easier and safer for you this Go to www.nephysio.com.au to help you locate a physiotherapist in North East Victoria.

General fitness advice for older people and tips for gardening safely, are also available by following the links on the North East Physiotherapy website.