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MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release



Canadian Association
Physiotherapy
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canadienne de
physiothérapie

Re-leaf from raking pain

Physiotherapists offer advice to prevent injuries

October 3, 2007 – At this time of year many homeowners will be getting their exercise by raking leaves. Raking is a physical activity that can help individuals stay active, but raking is often accompanied by the strains and pain associated with repetitive motions. Fortunately, raking injuries can be prevented by following a few guidelines. The Canadian Physiotherapy Association (CPA) recommends that individuals pace themselves, use good posture and body mechanics, and adopt a good technique for raking.

“Many people plant their feet, then over-reach and twist to rake in several directions from that position,” says physiotherapist Robynne Smith of Off Broadway Physiotherapy & Dizziness Clinic in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. It is important to maintain a good posture by changing your position and avoiding bending and twisting. Improper technique often leads to strains of the mid and lower back” she adds, “the repetitive strain of raking can be reduced by doing warm-up and cool-down exercises, using proper techniques, and by splitting the job into 20 to 30 minute segments.”

The following recommendations from the Canadian Physiotherapy Association will help minimize the risk of strains and sore muscles:

Before Raking:

- Be proactive about your health by staying fit and engaging in regular exercise so that household activities, like raking, won't take as much of a toll.
- If you have limiting back pain, ask for help from family members or neighbours, or hire someone to do it for you.
- Consult a health professional if you have any pre-existing health concerns.
- It's helpful to do warm-up exercises for the larger muscle groups such as the shoulders, back and the legs before all yard work.

Raking:

- Pace yourself by completing the work in 20 to 30 minute segments. Take frequent breaks and/or change to a different raking activity.
- Hold the rake handle close to your body to help maintain good posture while raking. Keep one hand near the top for better leverage and use your arms and legs more than your spine. Ergonomic rakes often have padded handles to reduce strain on the hands and wrists, and have special handles that encourage good posture by ensuring that the elbows are bent slightly.
- Change sides frequently and avoid twisting from the waist. When raking, the tendency is to plant the feet in a fixed position and rake in several directions from that position. Instead, place one foot ahead of the other which allows you to shift forward and backward easily as you rake.

Bagging:

- When bagging leaves, lift manageable loads. Keep your back straight and use your legs to do the lifting. If you have to stoop, face the pile of leaves and don't twist as you lift.
- Don't try to overreach to get those last few leaves.
- When lifting the bag of leaves, tense your stomach muscles to give your back additional support and keep the bag close to the body. Keep your back straight while lifting with the legs.
- Don't pile too many leaves into one bag, especially if they're wet – it will be heavy and awkward to lift.

When finished for the day, take a few moments to cool down by doing the same exercises performed prior to raking.

If you are experiencing pain, consult a physiotherapist. Physiotherapists are primary health care professionals who help people of all ages and lifestyles gain and maintain their physical mobility. With their applied knowledge and understanding of the human body in action, physiotherapists can work with you to increase your mobility, relieve pain, build strength, improve balance and increase cardiovascular function. Physiotherapists will also help you prevent the onset of pain or injury, allowing you to maintain your desired level of active living.

Visit the official CPA website for more health information, www.physiotherapy.ca.

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About CPA

Canadian Physiotherapy Association is the professional organization representing 10,000 members. It provides leadership and direction to the physiotherapy profession, fosters excellence in practice, education and research, and promotes high standards of health in Canada. More information is available at www.physiotherapy.ca.

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