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TALKING BACK

THE NEWSLETTER DEDICATED TO HEALTHY BACKS

Springing into Shape.

Spring is the season of renewal, and that applies to more than just your garden. It's a perfect time to rediscover all that the great outdoors has to offer. There's something for everyone.

Remember though, easy does it. If you've taken the winter off from exercise, it's easy to cause an injury when you get started again, whether you're gardening, spring cleaning or playing tennis. So make sure you warm up and stretch before any activity, and don't try to do too much at once. Each new activity puts stresses and strains on your body, so ease into it. There will be lots of beautiful days ahead to get everything done.

Before jumping into any exercise routine, it's a good idea to consult a chiropractor or fitness professional about what's best for you and your body. Work with these experts to discuss your fitness goals and develop a balanced workout program.

Let them know if you are training for a specific sport or if you have an old injury you could aggravate. Talk about any dietary considerations to enhance your fitness, and what types of cross training (or varying activities) they would recommend.

Whether you want to lose weight, out-jog your neighbour or win gold at the Olympics, the following are the key elements of a well-balanced fitness program:

- 1. Cardio endurance:** How well your heart and lungs supply oxygen to your body when you exercise. You build cardio endurance by regularly doing a minimum of 15 to 20 minutes of activities like running, walking, swimming, biking or ballroom dancing.
- 2. Muscular endurance:** How long you can repeat a movement or hold a position. Weight training and other activities that work your muscles will help you build muscular endurance.
- 3. Muscular strength:** How much weight you can comfortably and safely lift. Again, many activities contribute to muscular strength, but working with weights is key to increasing your ability to lift.
- 4. Flexibility:** How limber your body is. Activities like yoga, as well as a good program of stretches, help you increase and maintain flexibility.
- 5. Body composition:** The ratio of fat to bone and muscle in your body. There are guidelines for the ratio based on your height, weight and body type.

...continued inside

Dear Doctor

ASK A CHIROPRACTOR

Dear Doctor: I've read that a healthy diet is important for keeping my back healthy. How does this work?

Dear Patient: A well-balanced diet is essential for good health, and yes, this applies to your back as well. Vitamins and minerals contribute to the healthy formation and maintenance of bones, muscles and tissue — all important for a strong spine.

Follow these eating guidelines to keep your body, and your back, happy and healthy:

Eat a balanced diet: Make sure your daily diet includes servings from all food groups (grain products, vegetables and fruit, meats and alternatives, and milk products). If you don't already, include legumes (dried beans and peas) and dark green, leafy vegetables. These are good sources of vitamins and minerals, and the legumes also provide an alternative to meat as a protein. Choose low-fat dairy products to give your body the calcium it needs without the extra fat. Calcium is important for bone nourishment and helps lower the risk of joint or muscle-related injuries.

Keep your intake of junk foods to a minimum, and use higher-fat items such as butter, gravy and salad dressing sparingly.

Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating (available on the Health Canada web site at www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/food.htm or by calling 613-957-2991) can help you plan and monitor your meals and snacks. And there are lots of cookbooks that focus on healthy eating to give you ideas for balanced, nutrient-rich, low-fat meals.

Mind your vitamins and minerals: Vitamins and minerals play a complex role in helping our backs (and our entire bodies) function. For example, vitamin A helps bones and teeth develop and strengthens scar tissue following injuries. Vitamin B3 supports the nervous system, and vitamin D helps the body absorb and use calcium. It's also essential for growth, particularly in children.

Minerals contribute to the health of our bones and, in fact, are so vital that we cannot absorb vitamins without them. Minerals that are especially important for a healthy back include calcium, magnesium, iron, zinc, manganese, and copper. Deficiencies in these minerals can increase the risk of injury as well as the onset of osteoporosis.

A chiropractor, doctor or dietitian may be able to assess whether you need a nutritional supplement.

And a few final tips...Maintain a healthy weight, drink alcohol only in moderation and don't smoke. Ask your chiropractor or doctor for information to help you reach these goals.

Exercise regularly, even if on a busy day it means getting off the elevator early and walking those last few flights of stairs. Or walk a few extra bus stops on your way to work. Weight bearing exercises such as stair climbing, brisk walking and dancing are excellent ways to help keep your bones strong.

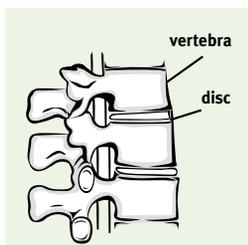
What's the spine all about?

The spine is a series of bones, linked together, that provides a protective shell around the major nerve centre of the body, and allows us to stand up. It performs essential functions for the body, and needs to be cared for properly.

The spine is divided into three major sections. The upper section (leading down from your skull) is the cervical spine; the middle section (where the ribs are) is the thoracic spine; and the lower section (reaching towards the pelvis) is the lumbar spine.

Directly below the lumbar spine is a bone called the sacrum (base of your spine), with two other bones on either side called the iliac bones, which together make a circle of bones you know as the pelvis.

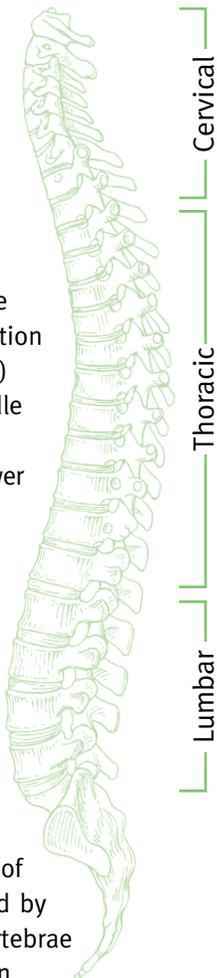
The spinal column is made up of 33 vertebrae (bones) separated by 23 discs. Only 24 of these vertebrae are moveable. The vertebrae in



your sacrum and coccyx (tailbone) are fused together during childhood, and have no discs between them. Not only does your spine support most of your

body weight, it also protects your spinal cord, which is the “central highway” of your nervous system.

The spinal cord carries messages to and from the brain, and to every part of the body, helping to monitor and coordinate everything from breathing to digestion to circulation. Pretty important stuff to take care of, wouldn't you say?



Springing into Shape *(cont'd. from cover)*

Talk to a fitness professional about which exercises will address your needs and, above all, are safe for you to do. A chiropractor may be able to guide you in selecting activities that will limit aggravation of old injuries. It's essential to always use the right techniques for any sport or fitness activity. Check with a trainer or health club staff for the recommended way to use weights and other equipment.

What does fitness do for my back?

Exercising regularly has great benefits for your body – including your back! Weight bearing activities such as hiking, brisk walking, stair climbing and dancing all strengthen your bones, and may help protect you against osteoporosis (a serious disease that results in deterioration of bone mass, especially in older people).

If you have strong abdominal muscles, this too will benefit your back. An oversized waistline leads to weak muscles in your abdomen, which means your organs and lower spine are not being held correctly inside your body. This may lead to back pain. Exercise doesn't have to be vigorous to be beneficial. Even a little activity three times a week can go a long way to improving your overall health and well being.



10 TIPS FOR KEEPING YOUR BACK HEALTHY.

- 1 Exercise regularly.
- 2 Follow a healthy diet.
- 3 Maintain good posture.
- 4 Stretch your spine before and after sports.
- 5 Don't overload your backpack or shoulder bag.
- 6 Stretch your legs and back after each hour of sitting.
- 7 Never cradle the phone between your neck and shoulder.
- 8 Sleep on your back or side, not on your stomach.
- 9 Invest in a good chair, pillow and mattress. It's worth it!
- 10 Have regular spinal check-ups.

Gardeners Are Athletes Too!

Before you grab those garden tools, limber up with some easy stretches:

1. While seated, extend your leg out straight in front of you, and place your heel on a low step or footstool (even the phone book will do). Keep your knee straight and lean forward gently until you feel a pull in the back of the thigh (that's your hamstring muscle). Don't bounce or strain. Hold for 15 seconds, relax and repeat. Now repeat with the other leg.
2. Stand up and balance yourself. Reaching behind you, grab your left ankle with your left hand. Pull your heel toward your buttocks and hold for 15 seconds. Relax and repeat. Now repeat with the other leg.
3. Stay standing and raise your arms above your head. Knit your fingers together, palms toward the sky, and lean to one side for 10 seconds. Then lean to the other side. Repeat this three times.
4. Hug yourself snugly and rotate as far as comfortable to one side. Hold for ten seconds, and then rotate to the other side. Repeat three times.

Now you're ready to rake and hoe!

Raking, hoeing, lifting, digging, kneeling, planting... almost enough physical activity to qualify for an international medal competition. OK, maybe not quite. But gardening certainly does count as physical activity, and as with any sport, you must use the right form and technique to avoid injury.

Remember these important tips:

- **Do the "scissors" when you rake:** Stand with your right leg forward and your left leg back while you rake. Switch every few minutes. This will keep you from bending and twisting your way into a sore back. Take periodic breaks while you're working.
- **Change hands frequently:** Changing hands when raking and hoeing prevents muscle strain on one side of the body. Try to stand as straight as possible with your head upright. Pause every few minutes to stretch.
- **Use long-handled tools:** Long-handled tools let you avoid bending forwards and sideways as you work, which can cause you to strain your neck or lower back. Check at a garden store for the latest models.
- **Lift properly.** Face the object you plan to lift, bend your knees, and draw the load in close to your body. Use the muscle power of your legs to lift. Don't lift heavy objects above your waist. Ask for help moving big flowerpots and bags of soil or garden waste.
- **Kneel to weed and plant:** Constant bending and squatting can put strain on your back, neck and leg muscles. You can buy special kneepads and mats that make kneeling on the ground more comfortable.

And finally, like all good athletes, drink plenty of fluids throughout your workday. Cool down at the end of your garden workout; repeat these stretches or take a short walk around the block. You've earned it!



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TREATMENT THAT STANDS UP.