### HINDMARSH AND FITZROY PHYSIOTHERAPY

### 8 SIMPLE TIPS TO HELPING YOUR BACK IN THE GARDEN

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### Springing In To Action !

At the beginning of spring the weather picks up and our gardens begin to stir. Things that grow need care and unfortunately the weeds grow just as fast as our flowers. While many of our patients come in for treatment of their shoulder, elbow and wrist pain caused by lifting awkward items, we predominantly see irritated backs from prolonged bending and carrying heavy loads.

Gardening inherently puts strain on the lower back, especially the discs. So if you're a keen (or even an unwilling) gardener it may be worthwhile keeping a few things in mind. As lots of tasks around the garden require repetitive activities that can lead to aches and pains.

To avoid strain, and to help minimise your risk of injury, pay attention to the following 8 tips



### Gardening- simple precautions

Gardening is an all year round activity. There is always something to be done no matter what the season. From sweeping and raking leaves, weeding, digging, mowing, planting, lifting, mulching and pruning. Its no wonder gardeners get a year round work out. Yet we don't think of it as an exercise session. However back pain can be a common occurrence and there are some tips to helping prevent and manage it, just as you would if you were heading to a gym session.

#### Warm up

Try a 10 minute brisk walk and stretches for the spine and limbs. Gentle back stretches in each direction, calf and quad stretches are a good start.

#### Vary your positions

Be aware of how your body feels as you work in your garden. If a part of your body starts to ache, take a break, stretch that body part in the opposite direction it was in, or switch to a different gardening activity. So make sure you give those working muscle groups regular breaks and change position and or take a short rest every 15-20 minutes. If you have been doing lots of bending, make sure you take the opportunity to arch backwards, if you've been doing a lot of reaching up high and leaning backwards, then lie on your back on the ground and hug your knees in towards your chest. Ideally change your jobs every half an hour and have regular breaks, even if it's just to grab a drink of water or use the toilet.

#### Make use of right tools

Make use of a garden cart or wheelbarrow to move heavy planting materials or tools. Keep the weight over the wheel. 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. A pruner on an extension pole will save you over reaching or the hassle of negotiating a ladder. Getting hold of a powered gardening tool can save you time and reserve your energy for the more enjoyable parts of gardening. A powered post hole digger for planting or an electric hedge trimmer may save your back.

#### Correct Posture

Keeping you back straight whilst doing gardening jobs is important. Accessories like knee pads or a kneeling bench will keep you pain free and more focused on perfecting your posture. Kneel rather than bend and where possible keep one hand on the ground.

#### Good body mechanics

Use good body mechanics when you pick something up or pull on something, such as a weed. Bend your knees, tighten your abdominals, and keep your back straight as you lift or pull things. Moving regularly will help you set up in the right position and hopefully avoid unnecessary twisting from side to side or over reaching. For example when lifting an object or digging with an implement keep your hands close to your body as the more you reach the harder muscles need to work. Importantly, when you do need to be in one position for more than a few minutes, it is important to stop regularly and stretch the muscles. Avoid twisting your spine or knees when moving things to the side; instead, move your feet or pivot on your toes to turn your full body as one unit. Avoid bending your wrist upwards when pulling things or using gardening tools. Instead, keep your wrist straight and use your shoulder muscles to pull and lift.

#### Observe basic lifting rules

Before lifting, get a firm footing by standing with feet apart. Bend at the knees and hips then grip the object firmly, Keep the load close to your body, Brace your spine , engage those deep tummy muscles and keep your back straight for the whole lift.

#### An Ergonomic garden

By bringing things on the ground up to waist height and things above to below your shoulder height you will resolve most of your ergonomic issues. Potting can be done more easily on an old sturdy table and raised garden beds or herb boxes make planting and picking a breeze. Using a small scaffold for fruit picking or tree and hedge trimming, provides a stable and comfortable platform from which to work and can be hired from most large hardware stores. If you suffer from back pain or just want to avoid it, consider installing raised garden beds. A garden bed height of between 60 and 90 cm should eliminate much of the need to bend, and bed widths of about 120 cm will allow you to comfortably access the entire garden without too much stretching.

#### Recognise your limits

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! End your gardening session with some gentle backward bending of your low back, a short walk and light stretching, similar to stretches done before starting. After all you've just finished a workout ! And don't forget, if you do injure yourself, then seek advice. Our friendly physios are always happy to get you back on track!

# IF YOU HAVE BACK PAIN



## OPTIONS

Whist anti -inflammatory medication has a role to play in the management of acute back pain, be wary of over reliance. Manual therapy, dry needling, specific and general exercise and activity modification strategies are all part of a holistic management solution with your physiotherapist.

### DON'T IGNORE THE PAIN.

Our caring Physiotherapists have the skills to correctly assess the problem and provide safe effective treatment. Early Treatment can be the key to a speedy recovery for anyone suffering low back pain.

#### Contact us to speak with a physio



### WE CAN HELP

At Hindmarsh and Fitzroy Physiotherapy we are friendly, experienced, patient focused professionals with a passion for helping a wide variety of people. We know that there are many excellent Physiotherapy practices to choose, but finding one you can count on and build a relationship with, knowing they have pride and expertise in their approach, high quality treatment regimes, empathy and support is not easy. This is us. Call or email us today for an appointment and we look forward to helping you soon. We look forward to your call

\*This article is not intended as a substitute for medical advice or treatment and should not be interpreted as such. If you are experiencing any of the symptoms mentioned in the article, please contact our physiotherapists for a comprehensive assessment and treatment plan. Always seek advice from a qualified medical professional and use of this information is at your own risk.