

15 SAFETY TIPS TO PREVENT A BACK INJURY DURING YOUR FALL CLEAN UP



Prevent a Back Injury This Fall

Raking up a gigantic pile of leaves might seem like a simple task, however, if it's done too abruptly with poor body mechanics, you can EASILY strain your precious back muscles. So before you pull out your rakes and leaf blowers, and potentially throw your back out, check out the following 15 Safety Tips:

1. Warm up for at least 10 minutes before doing any heavy yard work. Try walking around the yard, doing some circular arm movements, bending forward and backward, and to each side.
2. Use a rake that is comfortable for your height and strength.
3. Wear gloves or use a rake with padded handles to prevent blisters.
4. Wear shoes or boots with slip-resistant soles.
5. Keep a roll of trash bags close by while cleaning the yard to easily place fallen leaves and other debris into the bags, so you will not trip over something that might be hidden by the leaves.
6. When picking up leaves, bend at the knees – not the waist. According to the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons, if you're going to lift something: Position yourself as close to the object as possible so that you're more stable. Keep your feet shoulder-width apart to create a solid base of support. Always bend at the knees, tighten your abdominals and lift with your legs.
7. Avoid twisting your body while raking. Use your legs to shift your weight rather than twisting your back. Throwing leaves over the shoulder or to the side while raking involves twisting movements that can overly strain the muscles in the back.
8. Don't lift bags with your back. Bend your knees and lift with your leg muscles.
9. To avoid overuse injury, try switching sides every few minutes. Try raking 10 minutes left-handed and another 10 minutes right-handed.
10. Don't overfill bags so they become too heavy to lift. Try dragging the bags or using a wheelbarrow if you have to move them long distances.

11. If you're using a tarp and dragging leaves to a curb, don't overload it. And don't twist your body when you're pulling the tarp. If possible, have someone grab an opposite end to help you move the leaves.

12. Don't be a weekend athlete and try to bag all the leaves at once. Pace yourself and tackle leaves in several sections. Better yet, save the bagging for another day since you put your back at greater risk of injury by lifting right after raking.

13. Be sure to have a family member hold the ladder in place when climbing a ladder and do not stand above the level indicated by the manufacturer.

14. When you're done, gentle muscle stretching can help relieve tension in the muscles.

15. If your muscles are still achy after following tips #1-14, a hot bath can relax muscles.