

THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR

TUESDAY, MAY 27, 2008 ★ "Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" II COR. 3:17 ★ 50 CENTS ★ STATE EDITION

4 ways to avoid injury while doing yard work

Springtime gardening can be relaxing and therapeutic — all that digging, planting and working in the soil and enjoying the outdoors. But it also can be back-breaking and exhausting.

"Yard work can be considered another great form of exercise," says Dr. Stephen Ritter, of Methodist Sports Medicine/The Orthopedic Specialists.

"But, with any physical activity, it's important to warm up and stretch your muscles. Just as you are susceptible to back injuries when lifting weights, you also can be prone to back sprains when

weeding your garden, mowing your lawn or raking leaves," he says.

So, if you're an avid gardener, here are tips to keep your back healthy:

1 | WARM UP BEFORE YARD WORK Take time to walk around outside to prepare your muscles for moving, lifting, digging or bending. Stretch back muscles by leaning



forward carefully to touch your toes. For a seated back stretch, lean forward from your hips and reach for the floor and hold. A 5- to 10-minute warm-up for your back muscles will help prevent strains or soreness later.

2 | LIFT HEAVY LOADS PROPERLY Always bend your knees and use your legs to lift your body up. Instead of reaching forward to move a heavy object, walk to it and lift it straight up off the ground by bending your knees and keeping your spine upright.

3 | AVOID BENDING OVER A LOT Kneeling is always better than bending over for long periods. Try knee pads to protect your knees from dirt or soreness. If you're weeding, try sitting on a bucket to keep your body at an angle to support your back. If you're shoveling, place the tool directly in front of you, parallel to your hip bones.

4 | DON'T OVERDO IT Avoid straining muscles by rotating tasks to avoid repetitive movements. After 15 minutes of raking, change to pruning or mowing. Space out gardening tasks over several days.

For more information, visit www.methodistsports.com.

— Barb Berggoetz