

# All You Need to Know About Raking Leaves!

Many of us spend hours raking leaves in the fall. It is actually a great way to get some exercise and enjoy the brisk, colorful, fall days. However, beware, while raking can be a good exercise, too much twisting, reaching, bending, lifting and carrying bags of leaves can place excessive load on the spine, resulting in pain and injury. Physical Therapists recommend using good posture and body mechanics and the correct techniques for raking. In addition it is helpful to do warm-up exercises for the larger muscle groups such as the shoulders, back and the legs before and after yard work.

Wear loose, lightweight clothing – layers of clothing help adjust to increased body temperature and changes in weather. Shoes are important also – wear supportive shoes with good soles to prevent slipping and provide better support for your back.

“Raking leaves is a common fall activity that can cause soreness and injury,” describes Paul Burke, MSPT, Cert.MDT, CSCS. “The most common injuries are strains of the mid and low back. Prevention is key in avoiding such injuries. Follow the guidelines below to minimize your risk of injury or ask your Physical Therapist to show you the correct way to rake”.



## Raking and Bagging Tips:

- ❖ Hold the rake handle close to your body to help maintain good posture.
- ❖ Keep 1 hand near the top of the rake to increase leverage and one foot in front of the other, shifting weight forward and back as you rake.
- ❖ Try an ergonomic rake, available at garden stores – they place less stress on hands and wrist.
- ❖ Change sides frequently and avoid twisting from the waist.
- ❖ Pace yourself – section off larger yards so the job can be completed in stages that take about 30 minutes, rather than all at once.
- ❖ When bagging leaves, lift manageable loads. Keep your back straight, use your legs, do not twist, keep loads close to your body and tighten your stomach muscles to support your back.
- ❖ 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 5-10 minute walk

## Backward Bend Stretch:

1. With feet apart, place your hands on the small of your back.
2. Arch backwards until you feel a gentle stretch in your low back, as shown.
3. Hold for 5 seconds.
4. When raking or bagging repeat this stretch every 10 minutes.
5. This can also be done lying on your stomach, as a modified “push up”, - a great stretch after a day of yard work!



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