

Preventing those pesky FALL CLEAN-UP INJURIES



GUEST CORNER

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Fall-cleaning injuries

The physical activity of raking leaves requires your whole body to twist, torque, and bend. This repetitive action may cause muscle strains and injuries.

Most injuries are sustained from overusing muscles in the shoulders, neck and back. Our pelvis is the stable foundation that supports and protects the vulnerable lower back, which usually does not constantly bend, twist and torque. Our hips are the powerful movers; the hip joint is a ball-and-socket multidirectional joint supported by strong muscles that helps the body move in different directions. Thus, when we rake, our hip muscles drive the momentum. The shoulder joint is also a ball-and-socket joint and is supported by the shoulder blades with bigger muscle groups to off load on the vulnerable rotator cuff muscles in the shoulder. As a result, when we rake, the shoulder girdle muscles stabilize and support the neck, rotator cuff and smaller arm muscles.

Reducing Fall-cleaning related injuries

The following suggestions will reduce your risk of sustaining injuries during your Fall yard clean-up activities:

- Know your limitations and rather do short periods over several days;
- Always warm up before raking; for example, take a brisk 20-minute walk. Walk upright, swing your arms, and propel your body forward by using your Glutes taking longer strides. This will warm up your joints and muscles and get your circulation flowing;
- Do gentle stretches to prepare your body for the repetitive raking activity. Repeat 10 times to each side, hold each stretch for 5 deep breaths:
 - Stand with feet wider than shoulder width and knees slightly bent. Gently reach one arm across your body rotating from your trunk, hinging from your waist keeping your back flat.
 - Bend from your waist sideways taking your arm overhead as you bend.
 - Place one leg on a higher surface like a step, flex your foot backwards and keep your knee straight. Gently lean forward until you feel a

stretch behind your knee.

- Switch sides raking from right to left every few minutes;
- Stagger your feet in an open scissor stance with the left foot in front, right hand higher on the rake handle, raking towards the right and the opposite, raking to the left side;
- Keep your back straight with your knees lightly bent. Activate your core muscles by pulling your belly button to your spine;
- Move the whole-body, transferring weight from your front to your back leg, taking small steps;
- Avoid overextending your reach, pull your shoulder blades down;
- Avoid pulling too hard on heavy/wet leaves, because that will strain your back, neck and shoulders;
- Take a break every 15-20 minutes and hydrate;
- When you pick up bundles of leaves:
 - Bagging leaves: open your legs wide into a squat position, keep your back flat and support your elbows on your knees. If your knees allow you to kneel, kneel to pick up leaves also to protect your back; and
 - Raking onto a tarp: do not overload the tarp and twist the back to pull the tarp; instead pull smaller loads or get help to pull on the other end of the tarp.
- When you finish with a day of raking, do gentle stretches to cool down:
 - Lie on your back and pull one leg up to your chest, stretch the other leg out on the ground; and
 - Bend both knees up to your chest, and gently rotate your hips and pelvis from side to side.

Exercises to prevent Fall-cleaning related injuries

While we still enjoy the foliage, it is good to get your body in shape and ready for the physical activity of raking and bagging leaves.

In addition to stretching exercises, focus on the following strengthening exercises for the core (to help protect your lower back) and shoulder-blade (to protect the neck and rotator cuff tendons):

- Stand close to a solid table/cabinet. Place one leg in front in a lunge position and put your elbows against the table. Keep your back straight and abdominal muscles tight by pulling your belly button to your spine and squeeze your buttock muscles (Glutes) tight. Pull your shoulder-blades down into your back

pockets. If you feel strong, join the front leg to the back leg and drop your heels down until you feel a stretch in your calf muscles. Hold this modified plank position for 20 seconds and work your way up to about holding for a minute.

- Sit to stand. Get up from a chair by scooching forward to the edge of the chair. Lean forward with your arms to keep your back flat. Tighten your glutes and thigh muscles, lift your ribcage up to the ceiling and pull your abdominal muscles tight as you come up to a standing position. Do 5-10 repetitions several times during the day.

If you experience any pain or injury while raking, contact your physical therapist or health care provider. Happy, safe raking!

Lize Lubbe is the owner of Lize Lubbe Physical Therapy with its main practice located at 892 Route 35 in Cross River and a PT Studio in the premises of Apex Fitness (where her team focus on the rehabilitation of sports-related injuries). Learn more by calling 914-875-9430, emailing contact@lizelubbept.com or visiting www.lizelubbept.com.

While we are in awe of the warm and vibrant Fall colors, if you have a garden, it also means hard work: the reality of raking, picking up, and cleaning your yard.



We are hands on PTs!

The professional services of the team at

Lize Lubbe Physical Therapy

include:

- Pre & Post Surgery Rehabilitation
- Sports Injury Rehabilitation
- Neurological Rehabilitation
- Treatment of Musculoskeletal & Orthopedic Conditions
- Postural, Balance & Gait Training
- Pain & Headache Management
- Body Rebalancing through Diaphragm, Breathing & Pelvic Stability



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