



## Don't Fall into Bad Back Habits

The fall and winter season is a time to think about proper back care; especially while you are raking those autumn leaves or shoveling that winter snow.

### Did you know...

that the majority of episodes of acute lower back pain are caused by a muscular strain (such as from raking leaves or lifting heavy snow)? Even though this doesn't sound like a serious injury, the pain can be very severe and last for several hours, several days or even a couple of weeks.

To avoid acute back injury this fall and winter season, consider the following lifting techniques to reduce the risk of acute injury:

- **Rest.** If you feel tired, you probably are tired. Take small breaks to allow your body (and back) to rest.
- Always be sure to **bend at the hips** - not the low back; never twist. This is especially important to remember when shoveling snow.
- **Lead with the hips**, not the shoulders; when changing directions, move the hips first so the shoulders will move in unison.
- **Keep weight close** to the body, the closer the object is to one's body, the less likely it is to lead to back injury.

Most acute injury will resolve with conservative treatment within a few weeks. If you do experience an acute lower back pain episode try some of these conservative treatment options:

- **Rest** for one or two days to decrease muscle spasm and allow the back to rest. \*
- **Over-the-counter** (non-prescription) medications that can be helpful in relieving pain and addressing related symptoms.
- **Apply cold or heat immediately** after an injury, apply a cold compress 3 to 4 times a day for 15 to 20 minutes. Sometimes alternating cold and heat, or applying heat alone may be more effective (again, for 15 to 20 minutes at a time, 3 to 4 times a day).
- **Call your doctor if symptoms persist longer than two weeks or if your pain becomes worse.**

\*More extensive bed rest seems to be counterproductive because it leads to further deconditioning (weakening) of the muscles that provide critical support for the spine.

Reference: <http://www.spine-health.com>

