



Garden Variety Aches & Pains...

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Spring has Sprung! And as a result, we've already had folks coming into the clinic with gardening & yard work injuries.

And while we're not going to give you permission to toss your "Honey Do" list into the compost, we will give you a few tips on how to avoid some of the most common springtime muscular injuries that we see.

And, as always, if (despite these words of warning), your "green thumb" brings about a "red alert," don't hesitate to drop us an e-mail, give us a call, and / or schedule an appointment. We'll do our best to "nip it in the bud" before your pain is able to "take root."

"Weeder's Thumb"

"Weeder's Thumb" is an actual condition outlined in the medical text that we use as our primary reference material, Travell & Simon's Myofascial Pain and Dysfunction: The Trigger Point Manual.

"Weeder's Thumb" is caused by myofascial trigger points in the opponens pollicis muscle and the adductor pollicis muscle, which manifest as pain in the thumb and wrist. The pulling & twisting action associated with pulling weeds is a surefire way to develop these trigger points and their associated pain patterns.

As Travell & Simons explain,

"A common syndrome, 'weeder's thumb,' is caused by activation of the TrPs in these muscles when the patient pulls well-rooted weeds... The trouble arises when the patient repeatedly firmly grasps the base of the weed in a strong pincer grip, twists the weed to loosen the root, and then exerts an even stronger pincer grip to pull it."

In light of this, it may be helpful to alternate between a few different weed-pulling techniques, as opposed to repeatedly using this same manual "twist & pull" method time & time again. Digging some weeds up with a trowel, or using one's foot to push a shovel into the ground just adjacent to weeds may be a couple of good alternate methods.

The key, of course, is to avoid using the very same technique over & over again. No matter which technique it may be, using the same one again & again will make your muscles susceptible to a repetitive use injury.

Quadratus Lumborum Injuries

The Quadratus Lumborum (or "QL") muscle spans the area that is bordered by the bottom of your ribcage (the 12th rib), your lumbar vertebrae (the transverse processes of L1 - L4), and your pelvis (the crest of the ilium and iliolumbar ligament). The QL muscles are considered "core stabilizers," since they are very much involved in stabilizing your torso on your pelvis.

One extremely common way to injure or trigger the QL muscles is to improperly lift a heavy object, and twist one's torso while doing so (as in lifting and moving a potted plant from one spot to another).

Travell & Simons have this to say about the activation of QL trigger points:

"Activation of TrPs in this muscle often involves simultaneously bending over and reaching to one side to pull or lift something..."

When the QL muscles become triggered, it is common for the trigger points to cause an immediate, sharp stabbing pain in the low back (specifically, in the sacral area). Sometimes this pain can be so severe that the injured person cannot stand up straight, and has to resort to crawling on his or her hands & knees until the initial pain crisis has been resolved.

As Travell & Simons explain, those who suffer an acute, severe onset of the the QL myofascial pain syndrome often resort to crawling because "This posture requires no stabilization of the lumbar spine by the quadratus lumborum muscle." In other words, moving around in this way takes the load off of the QL muscles and allows them to "opt out" of participating.

Trigger points in the QL muscle can refer pain to the Sacroiliac ("SI") joint area, the hip or buttock, the greater trochanter, the abdomen, and the groin.

It is important to avoid this lifting & twisting motion when working in the garden or yard. You've heard it a million times, but it still stands true: Lift with your legs, not with your back. And, whenever possible, use a dolly, wagon, or hand truck to transport large pots or root balls from one area of your yard or garden to another.

"Squatter's Rights" Gone Wrong

Squatting down with one's legs open to plant flowers or pull weeds can result in trigger points in several muscle groups. Specifically, the quadriceps femoris group (the "quads"); the adductor muscles of the hip; the pectineus muscle; the gluteal muscles (the "glutes"); the hamstrings; and the calf muscles can all develop painful trigger points as a result of maintaining this squatting position for long periods of time. These trigger points can manifest pain in areas ranging from the low back on down to the feet.

Solutions to this dilemma may include using a soft pad or mat on which you can rest your knees in a kneeling position; using knee pads in the same kneeling position; or sitting on a low stool that allows you to reach your work area on the ground.

We hope that your green thumb adventures don't result in any of these injuries, but if they do, you'll know who to call.

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