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Four ways

4 ways to avoid those autumn aches and pains

As winter approaches, Ken Johnson sees the effects in his practice as a physical therapist. His patients start complaining about pain brought on by hours of raking leaves, picking up debris and performing other routine tasks to prepare their yards for the colder months.

Problems can include sore muscles, strained muscles and a host of other ills, said Johnson, who works with Body One Physical Therapy, which has four offices around Indianapolis.

For the most part, the muscle pains stem from overuse, he said.

"It's not the one bag of leaves, it's the 25th bag of leaves that you pick up," he said.

There's one sure way to avoid such injuries: Hire someone else to do it for you. But short of that, here are some hints from Johnson on how to deal with aches and pains that arise from autumn yard work.

1Stay in good shape: If you're going to be prepping the yard for winter, make sure it's not your first time engaging in physical exertion this season. If you do injure yourself and you are in shape, you're likely to heal faster than someone in worse shape.

2Warm up before you start: Consider doing a few jumping jacks before you tackle the task, whether it's raking leaves or rooting up bushes. A brisk walk or jogging slowly in place could make a difference.

"Just get the blood flowing a little bit," Johnson said. "Once you start moving, things start getting the blood flowing, and things feel a little bit looser."

3Plan ahead: Don't try to jam a season's worth of work into one day or one weekend. Instead, spread it out over a few days so you're not pushing yourself too hard.

4Ice and rest: If you do get hurt, use ice. Ice slows down the inflammatory process, which in turn speeds up healing. "Ice can really help to prevent that inflammation from spawning into a much bigger issue," Johnson said. Also, make sure that you rest for a few days. The last thing you want to do is engage in more activity and worsen the original injury.

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