

Spring is Coming!

by Dr. Brian S. Seaman, DC, FCCSS(C), FICC

The snow is melting – finally! But once it melts we have to tune up the lawnmower and rake up all those ol' wet leaves left behind last Fall. Hopefully the grass manages to revive itself after being under the leaves, ice and snow for the past six months.

As our thoughts turn to Spring, we should also be thinking of our own health and wellness. Some of us tend to 'slack off' over the winter season (especially over Christmas) on our exercise programs or fitness activities. Well – time to get back at it!

Not only is exercise and fitness good for you, it helps to protect your health and get you ready for Spring and Summer activities. It is important to stay healthy for your vacation time and trips away (perhaps to see the grandchildren).

For now there are a few good tips on what you can do:

- **Walking** – This is an excellent activity to tone the muscles of your hips and legs. It is also a great aerobic activity which in other words, strengthens your heart. **Caution** – If you have any difficulties with high blood pressure or a history of heart or lung problems, please ensure that you check with your health professional. Do not take chances!

If walking is not an option for you, other possibilities include elliptical trainer, cross country ski machine, swimming or water aerobics, or even elderobics. If you are looking for ideas, check with your local fitness facility.

- **Stretching** – As we get older our muscles and tendons tend to tighten and we lose some of our flexibility. Gentle stretching exercises will help to improve and maintain our flexibility which in turn will decrease the chance of injury. In other words, you will be less apt to 'pull' a muscle in your back or legs.
- **Toning** – Not only do you want a muscle to be flexible but also strong so that you can do the things that need to be done this time of year – cleaning up the yard, spring cleaning the house, cleaning up the basement or garage, and re-organizing the garden shed. There are a variety of exercises which can be used for toning and strengthening your muscles. One idea would be to check out www.fitin15.ca which has a number of exercise ideas plus motivational messages.

Now – once you've made your 'gotta do' list, plan your activities and allow ample time to accomplish your goals. Remember – you can't do everything in an afternoon – or even in a day. The weather may not cooperate (which is not unusual in the Maritimes) or if you have been less active over the Winter, you will be asking a lot of your body to do everything in a short period of time. That's really not fair to your body is it?

A good idea is to plan things out over a period of time – whether it be several weeks or weekends. If you have a lawn and garden, start planning now. Many of my patients find it useful to plan out their Summer starting in April or May and continuing on through the Fall. That way you do everything in a logical and planned manner, and never feel rushed.

Don't let yourself get tired, especially early in the season. If you have been less active over the Winter listen to your body. Take a break. Your muscles and joints will thank you for it.

If you do over do it, rest and ice are generally the best remedies. Applying ice to the injured area for

15-20 minutes several times a day will help. Always put a towel or a t-shirt between the ice and your skin (so you don't damage your skin). Also don't leave it on longer than 20 minutes; more is not better. If the area gets too cold, the body will shunt more blood to the area. This can result in increased inflammation, swelling and pain. As a suggestion, use a soft gel ice pack. It conforms to the body and you can comfortably lie down on your back (with your knees bent) and rest your back at the same time.

If your injury from overdoing it is severe or limiting your daily activity level please consult with your health care professional. I hear it everyday – “***I thought it would go away!***”! If the soreness or pain is still there after 2-3 days of rest and ice, schedule an appointment with your health care professional. The area should be examined to ascertain what the problem is. Do not assume it's just a 'pulled muscle'. You may have injured the joint or ligaments. Look after any little strains (that's muscles or tendons) or sprains (ligaments or joint capsules). Don't try to 'work through it'.

One last thing with the warmer months – be aware of overexposure to the sun.

- Keep well hydrated when you're outside; lots of water!
- Don't get overheated.
- Wear sunscreen – especially on your ears, nose and neck as well as any exposed skin.
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses.

This Spring lets get out and be active – let's see a little more 'Spring' in your step! Enjoy the weather and stay healthy!

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