

Keeping Fit for Action Days

Most people don't think of gardening or clearing up as exercise. Yet it's hard work and few people are properly prepared to do it. So before helping in Blackley Forest (or doing any work in your own back yard) it's worth remembering the following:

* **Warm-up exercises**

Before any vigorous activity, you need to warm your muscles up. Bend and stretch your back a few times to limber up.

* **Clothing**

Don't wear tight clothing or loose, unstable shoes when doing conservation work. Wear comfortable clothes and well-fitting solid shoes.

* **Digging or shovelling**

This involves bending, twisting and lifting and can cause back injuries. To work safely:

Don't stoop. Keep your back straight and slightly arched.

When lifting or shovelling, take the strain with your legs rather than your back. The leg muscles are stronger.

Don't stay in the same position for too long. It puts strain on your whole body.

Stop frequently and change your back position. Either do a task that requires a different working position or have a rest.

When shovelling rubble or earth, shovel small amounts each time.

Use a longer-handled spade so that you don't have to bend so far.

* **Weeding**

Don't strain yourself over-reaching. Move close to your work. And don't stoop down, however tempting it may be. It's better to kneel. Special knee-pads can be useful here.

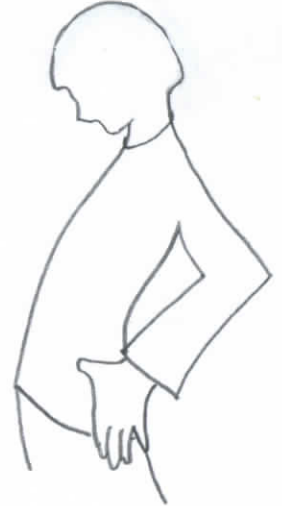
* **Pulling plants up**

Be careful when pulling up deep-rooted plants in particular. Remember to take the strain on your leg and arm muscles rather than your back.

Keep close to the plant and hold it firmly. With your feet apart, crouch, bend your knees and lean away from the plant.

Keep your back straight. Pull the plant up by straightening your legs.

If this feels as though it will be a struggle, get someone else to help you.



* **Lifting**

This is where a lot of back problems start, so:

Make sure you're stable.

Keep your feet about 45cms/18ins apart for balance.

Don't reach for the load or try to pull it towards you.

It may be heavier than you expect; move closer to it instead.

Hold the load as close to your body as possible.

Keep your shoulders well back and your arms as relaxed as you can.

Don't try to lift an object that is too heavy for you.

Test the weight by lifting one corner.

If the load is very heavy, you have several options:

Roll or push it, rather than carry it.

Divide the load and make several trips.

Use a wheelbarrow or trolley of some kind.

Ask for assistance. Like troubles, a load shared is a load halved!



Never carry a load that prevents you from seeing where you are going.

* **Equipment**

Make sure you're using the appropriate implement for the job.

Tidy any equipment away at the end of the session; don't leave it for others to trip over.

* **Relaxing after work**

When you've finished, don't slouch in a chair; try to sit up straight. Maintain the natural curve in your lower back by supporting it with a small cushion. This will help relieve any strain in your back.

A warm bath or shower will lessen any fatigue in the muscles you've been working.

This advice comes from a Member of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy and should help prevent injuries. But if you have subsequent symptoms that persist for more than 36 hours after the work you've been doing, please seek assessment and treatment from one of us.