

## Parish Health News

### Raking Leaves and Yard Cleanup



After a long hard day of raking leaves, you look forward to a refreshing sleep, but the pain in your back keeps you awake all hours of the night. Leaf raking injuries and associated pain can cause many a sleepless night and may even cost you a trip to the Doctor or Physical Therapist. Lack of preparation coupled with poor leaf raking techniques increases the likelihood of pain and injury. Before tackling that leaf-covered lawn why not follow a few simple guidelines that can help prepare your body for the work at hand and reduce the chances of injury. Several steps to keep in mind when raking your lawn include starting with a proper warm up, choosing the right tool, dressing appropriately, using proper techniques and pacing yourself.

#### Choosing the Right Tool

Rakes come in all sizes and shapes. The new ergonomic rakes (bent handles and possibly an adjustable rake-head) are not good for everyone. They are designed to prevent excessive bending, but you have to determine what rake handle "fits" your body the best. Plastic rake-heads are lighter and can still do a great job of gathering the leaves. Wide rakes (up to 36 inches) can speed up the job, but they also might cause you to use more force to pull the rake through the pile of leaves. The standard rake size might be better.

#### Dressing Appropriately

Wear shoes that will keep you from slipping. Many of the leaves might have gotten wet from the night dew or a recent rainfall. If it is sunny, use sunscreen. Wear clothing that is appropriate for the temperature that you are working in, but will also protect you from ticks, spiders and other bugs found in your yard and leaves. They may bite and could transmit diseases.

#### Using Proper Leaf Raking Techniques



Stand upright with a slight bend at the waist. Your feet should be "staggered or a scissor stance" for stability. This enables you to extend the rake and pull it back towards you with the least amount torque on your back. Your knees should be slightly bent. Raking is usually a dominant hand chore with the dominant side doing most of the pulling, but try to switch sides and change your feet position often. Each foot should get the opportunity to be the lead foot and each hand can be placed near the top of the rake and perform most of the pulling action. Don't overextend your reach because this will force you to flex at the waist and flex your shoulders excessively to extend the rake forward. Don't try to pull too hard or too many leaves at one time. This will cause the spine to twist excessively and might cause damage or an injury.



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(Information from Ace Sports and Rehabilitation Institute)