

Step Safely into Spring **by Ryan and Joanna Sleik**

With the final days of winter behind us we can look forward to all the great activities that we can do with the warmer weather. Particular activities that come to mind in our area are gardening, golfing, and running. Although each of these activities is very different, the principles for prevention of injuries in each of these sports, and many others, are similar. By the way, if you don't think that gardening is a sport I think you should talk to my wife. Just the shopping trip for bulbs and supplies is more tiring than running a half-marathon!

Warm up and stretch. After anticipating the beginning of early season sports it is sometimes difficult to take things slowly and progressively return to our favorite activities. It would be best not to plant all your flowerbeds, golf 18 holes, or run 10 kilometers your first day out. Think about warming up by performing some gentle stretches for your neck, shoulders, back, hips and legs before heading out. Simple stretches can help your tissues become accustomed to the work they will have to do ahead. It's best not to stretch cold muscles so make sure you get some light exercise such as a 5 or 10-minute walk or light jog before getting started.

Be good to your body. Lifting and carrying should be performed to your capability. Try to think of good body mechanics by keeping weight close to your body and using your legs to lift objects from the ground. Golfers should remember to take it easy at the driving range and to start with light irons for the first few balls. Unless you golf like I do, you probably don't swing more than 6 or 7 times at your first tee so remember to step back at the driving range and stretch after every few shots. Runners should avoid steep hills, sprints, or maximal efforts if you have not been running through the winter. Try alternating running and walking or join a learn to run club if you are new to the sport.

Use the right equipment. If you have a weak or painful back ask for help or use wagons or wheelbarrows to move things around in the yard or at the store. Cushions for kneeling on the ground are great for the knees, and the right kinds of shovels and gardening tools are helpful in reducing strain to your shoulders and wrists. Make sure you are using the right clubs for your body and use a bag with straps for both shoulders and a cart if you need a little extra help. Finally, check your runners for heavy creases in the foam, worn soles, and tattered materials. Most runners have a life span of about 6 months or 600 kilometers depending on your weight and usage. If you are still in your 1988 Reebok Cross Trainers you should bronze them and put them on the mantle!

Have a safe and healthy spring and enjoy the warmer weather in the months to come. For more information on how to prevent injuries in the garden, on the greens, or on the trails please see www.physiotherapy.ca or talk to your local physiotherapist.