

Turning Chores into useful exercise

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Doing dishes well

Washing dishes are a part of daily life and it is important to know how to do them with good posture. Maintaining good posture can have a positive carry-over effect onto other daily activities. Here are some key points to keep in mind while doing dishes:

1. Stand tall
2. Stick your chest out to straighten out the back (without arching the lower back)
3. Roll the shoulders back into a neutral position
4. Brace abdominal muscles for further stabilization
5. Bend at the hips without overarching your lower back by slightly sitting back
6. Bend the knees slightly

When reaching for something, avoid rounding your shoulders or upper back but rather push the hips slightly back (by bending at the hips) resulting in a better reach without rounding the back or shoulders. This allows the rotator cuff muscles to stabilize the shoulders while washing the dishes.

When needing to pick up an object that is located to the side, try to avoid over-reaching but rather take an extra step towards the object that needs to be picked and return to where you were standing.



Lawn Mowing

As we all know, mowing the lawn is something we can hide from and can be quite strenuous but a good way to get yourself active. It is important to maintain correct posture to avoid injuring oneself during the activity.

When mowing in a forward flexed position with arms straightened, it can place a lot of tension in the lower back and/or the upper shoulders. To prevent this ensure that your back is straight (straight doesn't mean completely vertical). The movement should be driven with your legs and not your arms, therefore keep elbows tucked at the sides of your body and set the scapula (shoulders rolled back). Whilst doing this remember to activate your abdominals to ensure pelvic stability and to help prevent arching of the back.

Things to remember to help maintain the good posture:

1. Rather do it in short distances and have a break than doing longer periods with poor posture.
2. Wear shoes with good grip - if you slip while mowing the lawn it can cause you to compromise your correct posture.
3. Remove objects before you start, so that it doesn't interrupt you while mowing.
4. Set the handle bars correct height for yourself to help maintain good posture. The bar should not be too low or too high (roughly elbow height).

Who said work and training can't be combined.



Washing windows

Correct posture



Incorrect posture



Keep a neutral spine- This means avoiding extremes such as rounding your upper back or excessively curving your lower back. Avoid twisting wherever possible. Keeping the spine aligned prevents injury.

Brace your core- In doing so this helps to protect your back. Ideally, we would like to activate a muscle called the Transverse Abdominus (TVA). The transverse abdominus helps to compress the ribs and organs, providing thoracic and pelvic stability.

Without a stable spine, one aided by proper contraction of the TVA, the nervous system fails to recruit the muscles in the extremities efficiently, and functional movements cannot be performed properly.

Repeated overhead strokes- Repeated overhead movements might cause nerve impingement in the shoulder. If this is the case, consider alternating between left and right hands. If the pain persists, you might want to try horizontal strokes. If the window is too high to use horizontal strokes, use a step stool or chair to raise yourself to the desired height.

Washing Glass doors- Bending down to wash the bottom of the glass door is inevitable. Therefore, we need to ensure proper technique when doing so. Ensure that when you bend, the correct hinge technique is used. This means bending at the knees and hips and not at the back. You need to ensure that your spine is neutral and that your back is straight. This prevents lower back pain.

Calories burnt- If you work hard at it, you can burn up to 30 calories every 15 minutes!

Correct posture while performing daily chores



Cleaning the shower

This is often seen as an odious task that leads to back ache and feelings of discomfort. However, if we use the correct techniques and keep an aligned posture while performing these chores, we can use it not only to have a spotless household but as an exercise tool to keep our bodies strong and healthy.

In figure A, I am placing my spine in an uncomfortable position, which could lead to back pains if maintained for a lengthy period. My hinging pattern (bending in the hips and not in the back) is incorrect, and my abdominals are not switched on.

In figure B, I am placed in a stronger position with my back nice and straight following a correct hinging pattern (bending in the hips and not the back). My abdominals are switched on throughout the movement and when getting up and down I am using my gluteus maximus (big bum muscle). You can place a towel or sponge underneath your knee if it feels at all uncomfortable.

How to clean a bath with the correct posture



The incorrect posture that people usually find themselves in when cleaning the bath can lead to lower or upper back discomfort. The incorrect posture shows arching of the upper back. To correct this, you can think of lifting your chest up, rolling your shoulders back and tucking your chin slightly. This will lead to an upright back posture. The positioning of your hips is also important. You can think of tucking the pelvis in by imagining you're bringing your hips bones up to your ribs. This will help take the pressure off of your lower back.

When washing the opposite side of the bath, it's helpful to use a cleaning tool with a long stem to help you reach, without having to compromise your posture. To reach the other side, think of hinging/bending from the hips while keeping your abdominal muscles braced, bringing the hip bones to the ribs, your spine tall, your chest open and your chin slightly tucked.

Additional tips:

- Take any objects that are on the rim of the bath off, cleaning around them can be more time consuming and compromise your posture.
- Use a towel/pillow to cushion under your knees when kneeling next to the bath.
- Move around the bath as you clean different sections. This will help you avoid getting into an uncomfortable position from reaching for a section.
- If you get tired, take a break!

Vacuuming can be a challenge



When you are vacuum cleaning it's very important to bend from your hips and knees and not your back. In the first picture, the posture is incorrect as I am bending (rounding) from my back, this results in more strain placed on your back and can lead to back problems in future. It can also lead to shoulder problems, as the rounded back position affects the shoulder complex.

An effective way of bending (Picture 2) is by bending from the hips in a hinge like fashion (hip-hinge), if you want to bend down further, you bend from your knees, while maintaining the straight spine. This enables you to use the correct musculature (buttocks) to perform the movement, and it reduces the risk of developing back problems in future. It is also important to keep your chest open.

Doing laundry

At the Washing room

This will depend on the method of washing, using an automated washing machine or washing by hand.



When washing by hand it is important to assume a comfortable standing position at the basin (since you will be standing here for quite some time). Stand as close to the edge as possible with your feet about shoulder width apart. When bending over the basin make sure to bend at the hips and knees and not your back. (Think: keep your knees relaxed, press your hips back). Keeping your abdominals activated while bending over will help to keep your back straight. Doing washing by hand is enough of a physical activity, I will not try to make it harder. Be sure to focus on using your upper back-, chest-, and shoulder muscles to wash the laundry and not just your hands and arms.

When using a washing machine, the above-mentioned guideline can be used to ensure a safe body position when inserting and removing the washing from the machine. To make this step a bit more of an exercise you can focus on inserting and removing only one piece of clothing at a time and placing, not dropping it into your laundry basket. Remember to bend at the knees & hips and to keep your back straight and core engaged when bending, focus on squeezing the glutes' when you stand up.

Walking to the washing line



When carrying your filled laundry basket to the washing line it is important to pick an appropriate carrying style. This will depend on personal preference as well as which muscles you would like to work. The five most common carrying styles includes: the grab and go, the side arm carry, the front carry, the over-under and the overhead carry. Each of these styles have their advantages and disadvantages, I would encourage you to give them all a try and decide on your favourite. It is important to take note of the basic principle to follow when carrying an object - Pickup and lower with intent: use your hips and legs, keep your core engaged, back straight and "chest up". Maintain this stable position when walking: core tight, chest up, relax your shoulders.

At the washing line



Shaking the laundry out: Start off by taking a comfortable shoulder width stance, contract your glutes and abdominals to create a stable base, next grip the item of laundry tight and shake it up and down with relatively straight arms. Take care not to shrug up, keep your shoulders relaxed but active.

When hanging the washing the most important points to take note of is your body position. Ideally, we want your feet at a comfortable position about shoulder width apart, your back in a neutral position (not excessively bent forwards or backwards) and your shoulders relaxed (not shrugged). In this position you want to focus on handing the item of clothing in a smooth and controlled manner using your shoulder, back and chest muscles to guide the movement.

