

# The Medical Minute: Avoid overexertion injuries from 'spring fever'

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Even the most die-hard couch potato can come down with a case of spring fever as the days get longer and the weather warms. You know the symptoms.

[Running shoes](#), bicycles and sports equipment call out to you after months of collecting dust in the closet or garage. Buoyed by sunshine and warm breezes, you embrace your beloved activity for hours at a time, with an intensity usually reserved for teenagers in love.

You experience a strong desire to clean up the yard and prepare gardens and flower beds. This results in hours of lifting, shoveling, bending, digging and yanking.

It's wonderful—until you wake up the next morning, and you can't move.

Overexertion injuries are as common as budding flowers this time of year. Depending on your age and the type of injury, spring fever can put you out of commission for anywhere from a few days to a few weeks.

Dr. Cayce Onks, who practices [family medicine](#) and primary care [sports medicine](#), says adults are more susceptible than children because, well, kids are resilient. "Most of them are going to be OK."

Adults older than 50, and those who suffer from [osteoarthritis](#), have an increased risk for flare-ups and injuries as they spend more time being active and outdoors. "Depending on what their activity goals are, that can

really shut them down for a while," Onks says.

But it doesn't have to be this way.

Here are some of Onks' tips for safely getting back in the swing of things this spring.

## **Take it slow**

The [American Heart Association](#) recommends 30 minutes of [moderate intensity](#) activity five days a week all the time. Of course, when it's snowy, icy, windy, rainy or cold during the winter months, it can be hard to achieve that.

"You run into problems if you've been sitting on the couch for four or five months and haven't done anything, then you go into a sport where you are training really hard," Onks said. "You should more gently ease into things and prepare yourself."

Simply taking a brisk half-hour walk most days of the week and stretching the major muscle groups afterward will prepare most people for spring activity. "Work on your flexibility," he said. "Stretching your quads, hamstrings and low back are the big things."

## **Build balance and strength**

Balance, especially for older adults, is important for injury prevention.

"The better you can train your balance, the less risk you have for falls," Onks said. "When your neurological system works more efficiently, you can contract your muscles quicker and respond to changes in the ground much faster. That can help you get out of trouble."

Balancing on one foot for 30 seconds at a time, switching to the other foot and repeating for a few sets can improve balance, as well as decrease injuries in the knees and hips. You also can learn how to do some of these techniques by watching this video.

Even if you don't have a gym membership or access to weight-training machines, you can do basic exercises such as push-ups, sit-ups, bicep curls and tricep dips at home to build and maintain muscle strength.

## **If all else fails...**

Despite all the preparations, you still might pull a muscle, strain a tendon or experience delayed-onset muscle soreness a day or so after increased activity.

Onks recommends taking Tylenol or Ibuprofen if necessary to ease aches and pains, maybe icing and gently stretching the affected area. Give affected muscles a few days rest to recover. If problems persist beyond that, or if pain is sharp, check with your doctor.

"Everybody needs to be active on some level for general health and well-being, so I would rather they start than not," Onks said. "But if you go from nothing to a pretty intense schedule, your body will likely not handle that well."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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