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Soaking up sun in the garden

Posted by: [The Michigan Citizen](#) Posted date: May 20, 2013 In: [Fresh Ideas](#) | comment : 0

Physical fitness tips to help you remember the garden, not the aches

By Suezette Olaker, M.D.

[Special to the Michigan Citizen](#)

Now that the weather finally permits gardening, it's tempting to spend long periods at work. Beware of bad habits that can make tasks tedious by treating gardening as you would any other exercise — with warm ups, cool downs and stretches.

- A few minutes of walking briskly is an excellent way to warm up.
- Do one arm rowing by reaching forward with first one arm, then the other. After several repetitions with a comfortable reach, gradually reach further and further — until your upper back twists somewhat with each extension.
- Do arm push-ups while standing by doing push-ups against a wall for upper arm and back.
- A few twists of the head help neck muscles.
- Paying attention to your core while gardening helps increase strength and stamina. Remember, back and abdomen work together; strengthening one part helps the other. Maintaining good alignment is important.
- While gardening, keep your back straight — whether you are standing or squatting.
- Avoid overreaching, which keeps your back in a strained position too long, whether long handled tools while standing, or hand tools while squatting or sitting.
- Don't lift and twist in the same movement. Lift first, then twist.
- Remember proper lifting techniques. Squat, grip the item and then use legs for support when lifting.
- Avoid an achy back by not spending too much time in one position, and include a few stretches to prevent muscle strains. Twist from side to side several times. Do side bends. Then, with arms straight, alternate bending forward and backward (raising arms overhead).
- Take time for a few deep breaths, which helps keep muscles relaxed.
- Instead of bending over with legs straight, try squatting or kneeling (on a pad or using kneepads). Sitting on a pad and working the rows from a seated position is another option.
- After you complete your gardening, spend a few minutes cooling down.

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- Walk slowly while breathing deeply for a few minutes.
- To keep muscles loose, include both rhythmic repetitions and stretches — holding a position at least 30 seconds (the minimum time required for muscles to actually stretch).

In later in the day, invest in stretches, to keep muscles from gradually stiffening. Try several reps of the following:

- Lie flat on your stomach. With knees straight, lift one leg at a time as high as is comfortable. Hold a few seconds, then release. Next, with legs outstretched, place hands shoulder width apart. Push up as far as is comfortable to arch the back. Hold a few seconds, then release.

- Draw knees up to the chest and rock from side to side. Lie flat for a few seconds, then repeat.

Get your free Vitamin D — all summer long

Vitamin D requires sunlight to convert from the inactive form to the active form.

When ultraviolet rays from sunlight shine on the skin, precursors to vitamin D are formed. They move into the bloodstream and are carried to the liver, where processing continues, and from there, to the kidneys where activation is completed.

Vitamin D increases the absorption of calcium, one function of which is to strengthen bones. It is important in proper development of bones and teeth. It boosts the immune system, which could lower risks of multiple sclerosis and rheumatoid arthritis. Proper levels lower the risks of hypertension, diabetes and memory loss.

Melanin has a role in vitamin D absorption. The darker the skin, the greater the protection against skin cancer but the lower the absorption of vitamin D. Thus, darker-skinned people need more, but in temperate climates may get less vitamin D than needed. Also, use of sunscreens decrease vitamin D absorption.

Scientists differ in their conclusions of how much vitamin D we need. Approximately 20 minutes of sunlight during peak hours can produce 20,000 units of vitamin D in 24 hours in light-skinned people. Optimal sun exposure in melanin dominant people may be up to 6 times higher.

Dietary sources include alfalfa, some mushrooms, beef liver, fatty fish and fish oils. However, the primary "source" is sunlight. Technically, since our bodies are able to manufacturer it, "vitamin" D is NOT truly a vitamin. However, it is essential for life.

Vitamin D toxicity from sunlight does not occur because of the action of the body's feedback mechanism, which prevents levels from becoming too high. Excesses are degraded. Toxicities could occur from supplements (scientists still disagree about levels), with symptoms ranging from decreased appetite, nausea and vomiting, to increased urine and thirst, to weakness, itching, insomnia and depression, to renal failure.

What's the best solution? For now, soak up the sun; later, supplement carefully.

Dr. Suezette Olaker is a Detroit-based physician who serves as vice chairman of the Detroit Food Policy Council. She can be reached at solaker2@yahoo.com



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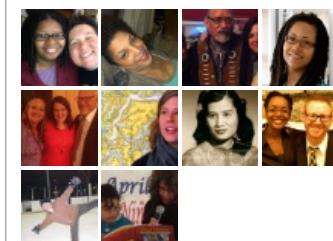
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