

## 10 Health Tips for Autumn Leaves Clean-Up

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Pumpkins in the cornfields,  
Gold among the brown,  
Leaves of rust and scarlet,  
Trembling slowly down.  
Birds that travel southward,  
Lovely time to play,  
Nothing is as pleasant,  
As a lovely autumn day!  
---Carmen Lagos Signes

In many parts of the country, raking leaves is a necessity during the fall months. Both for those unaccustomed to physical activity and regular exercisers, the dynamics of raking can lead to [strain](#) and injury to the back, shoulders, and wrists, according to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS).

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission reports that over 12,000 Americans were treated for injuries directly related to leaf raking in 2004. Raking requires a number of different activities, including twisting, bending, lifting, and reaching, that utilize several different muscle groups. Improper use of lawn tools along with the potential for tool-related accidents further compounds the risk of injury to the bones and muscles.

You can ease the strain and pain of raking -- fall's most taxing task by taking the following precautions to minimize your risk of sustaining an injury:

1. **Avoid twisting your body while raking.** Use your legs to shift your weight rather than twisting your back. Throwing leaves over the shoulder or to the side while raking involves twisting movements that can overly strain the muscles in the back.
2. **Use a properly-sized rake** for your height and strength.
3. **Wear gloves** to help prevent blisters on the hands.
4. **Bend at the knees**, rather than the waist, to pick up items.
5. Do some form of light **exercise for ten minutes to warm up the muscles** prior to raking.
6. Try to **vary your movements** as much as you can to avoid overuse of muscle groups.
7. **Wear shoes with skid-resistant soles** to minimize the risk of falling. Sturdy shoes can also reduce the risk of injuries to your feet.
8. **Don't overdo.** Raking is an [aerobic](#) activity - you may need to take frequent breaks or slow your pace if you are an infrequent exerciser. (It's better to live with the leaves tomorrow than with a [sore back!](#))
9. As with any form of exercise, be sure to **drink plenty of fluids** to combat [dehydration](#).
10. **When you're done, gentle muscle stretching** can help relieve tension in the muscles. A hot bath can relax muscles.