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Avoid Spring Cleaning Spills

Orthopaedic surgeons offer tips to prevent injuries throughout the home this spring

ROSEMONT, Ill.—As the weather becomes warmer, people start preparing their homes and yards for the spring and summer seasons. Projects such as yard work, cleaning and painting become priorities on the to-do list. However, thousands of orthopaedic injuries occur each year as a result of mishaps around the house. That is why the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons urges people to take the proper safety precautions to reduce the number of spring cleaning-related accidents.

- More than 530,000 ladder injuries, nearly 72,000 garden tool-related injuries and approximately 239,000 lawn mowing injuries were treated in hospital emergency rooms, doctors' offices and clinics in 2005, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

“Many spring cleaning injuries occur when people rush or do not follow the proper safety precautions,” explained Stephen Hurst, MD, orthopaedic surgeon and Fellow of the Academy. “Because most injuries are preventable, it is important to use the appropriate equipment for each project and take your time to minimize spring cleaning-related accidents.”

Because orthopaedic surgeons not only treat, but try to prevent injuries of the bones, joints and muscles, the AAOS recommends the following guidelines for spring cleaning projects:

- Proper techniques for lifting, carrying and bending should be part of any spring cleaning project:
 - Separate your feet, shoulder-width apart, keep your back upright and bend at the knees while tightening the stomach muscles.
 - Lift with your leg muscles as you stand up; don't try to lift any object by yourself if it is too heavy or an awkward shape.
- Use a step stool instead of furniture – such as a couch or dining room chair – when dusting hard to reach areas.
- Ladders used for chores – such as washing windows, painting, cleaning gutters and trimming trees – should be placed on a firm, level surface. Never place a ladder on ground or flooring that is uneven, soft or wet.
- Over-reaching or leaning too far to one side when working on a ladder can also make you lose your balance and fall. Your bellybutton should not go beyond the sides of the ladder.
- When gardening, avoid prolonged repetitive motions during activities such as digging, planting, trimming and pruning. It is also important to wear gloves to reduce blistering and protect the skin.
- Read product labels for proper use and wear protective clothing and gloves when using chemicals for gardening or cleaning. Store all chemicals – at the appropriate temperature, which is usually indicated on the package – in a place that is out of reach of both children and pets.
- Take frequent breaks and replenish fluids to prevent dehydration. If you experience chest pain, shortness of breath or other signs of a heart attack, seek emergency care, such as by calling 9-1-1.

For additional spring cleaning related injury prevention tips

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