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Pull Your Weeds, Not Your Back, To Make Your Garden Grow

As springtime approaches, weather warms up and leaves turn green, many people will spend more time outside planting bulbs, mowing the lawn and pulling weeds. Gardening can provide a great workout, but with all the bending, twisting, reaching and pulling, your body may not be ready for exercise of the garden variety.

Gardening can be enjoyable, but it is important to stretch your muscles before reaching for your gardening tools. The back, upper legs, shoulders, and wrists are all major muscle groups affected when using your green thumb.

A warm-up and cool-down period is as important in gardening as it is for any other physical activity," said Dr. Scott Bautch of the American Chiropractic Association's (ACA) Council on Occupational Health. "Performing simple stretches during these periods will help alleviate injuries, pain and stiffness."

To make gardening as fun and enjoyable as possible, it is important to prepare your body for this type of physical activity. The following stretches will help to alleviate muscle pain after a day spent in your garden.

Garden Fitness Stretches

- Before stretching for any activity, breathe in and out, slowly and rhythmically; do not bounce or jerk your body, and stretch as far and as comfortably as you can. Do not follow the no pain, no gain rule. Stretching should not be painful.
- While sitting, prop your heel on a stool or step, keeping the knees straight. Lean forward until you feel a stretch in the back of the thigh, or the hamstring muscle. Hold this position for 15 seconds. Do this once more and repeat with the other leg.
- Stand up, balance yourself, and grab the front of your ankle from behind. Pull your heel towards your buttocks and hold the position for 15 seconds. Do this again and repeat with the other leg.
- While standing, weave your fingers together above your head with the palms up. Lean to one side for 10 seconds, then to the other. Repeat this stretch three times.

- Do the "Hug your best friend." Wrap your arms around yourself and rotate to one side, stretching as far as you can comfortably go. Hold for 10 seconds and reverse. Repeat two or three times.

Finally, be aware of your body technique, body form and correct posture while gardening. Kneel, don't bend, and alternate your stance and movements as often as possible to keep the muscles and body balanced.

When the Bulbs Are Planted...

If you already feel muscle aches and pains and did not complete the warm-up and cool-down stretches, there are ways to alleviate the discomfort. Apply a cold pack on the area of pain for the first 48 hours or apply a heat pack after 48 hours, and consider chiropractic care.

Extra Weight Someone Else's Problem

Most Americans See Excess Pounds on Others but Not Themselves

April 12, 2006 -- Most Americans see a serious weight problem among other Americans but often can't see it in themselves.

So says a new survey from the Pew Research Center. The survey, done by telephone in February and early March, included 2,250 randomly chosen U.S. adults.

The survey showed widespread agreement that the U.S. is heftier than it should be. But most participants thought those extra pounds were on other people's bodies.

Among poll takers, 90% said most Americans are overweight. A smaller group -- 70% -- said most people they know are overweight. Even fewer -- 39% -- called themselves overweight.

Participants mainly blamed insufficient exercise for America's weight problem, followed by lack of willpower about what to eat, the survey also shows.

Pounds Piling Up

When asked if Americans are more overweight than five years ago, 85% of poll takers said yes, and two-thirds called that trend a "major problem."

The CDC recently reported that seven out of 10 U.S. adults are overweight or obese. But in the Pew survey, less than four in 10 thought they were overweight, showing a gap between perception and reality.

Health experts use the term "obese" for people whose BMI (body mass index) is 30 or higher. The term "overweight" describes people with a BMI of at least 25 but less than 30.

The Pew survey used the term "very overweight" instead of obese. Participants reported their weight and height. Half of those who fit the government's "overweight" category called their weight "just about right," the survey states.

Fewer Dieters

The survey shows fewer dieters than in the past and a big emphasis on exercise.

A quarter of participants reported currently dieting. About half (52%) said they had dieted in the past.

Pew reports that in a poll taken 15 years ago, slightly more people (57%) reported ever dieting. The new and old polls didn't necessarily include the same people.

Both polls showed that among people who had ever dieted, about 75% reported losing at least 5 pounds and keeping that weight off for at least a year. In other words, dieting may have been more common 15 years ago, but people weren't much better at it then.

"Nearly everyone -- dieters and nondieters alike -- say that is difficult to lose weight," the new poll states. For instance, 59% said it is "very hard" for people who are very overweight to lose weight. Women, people aged 50 and older, overweight people, and dieters were more likely to agree that weight loss is very hard for the very overweight.

Exercise a Big Issue

Why are so many people in the U.S. overweight? Insufficient exercise is the biggest reason, the poll shows.

Poll takers heard a list of four factors possibly related to the U.S. weight problem. Here is that list, along with the percentages of participants who called those factors "very important" in understanding why people in the U.S. are "very overweight":

- Failure to get enough exercise: 75%
- Lack of willpower about what to eat: 59%
- Kinds of foods marketed in restaurants and grocery stores: 50%
- Genetic and hereditary factors: 32%

Almost all participants said a person's weight affects his or her attractiveness to some degree (91%). Most said a person's weight affects his or her chances of having a long and healthy life (96%), the survey also shows.

Bottled Water: Better Than Tap?

The crystal-clear mountain springs, sparkling glaciers, and pristine landscapes pictured on bottles and in ads must help sell bottled water, judging by the numbers. The average American drinks more than 24 gallons of bottled water each year—more than milk, coffee, or beer. Only soda is more popular, but bottled water is catching up, its sales more than doubling in the U.S. during the past decade, totaling nearly \$10 billion last year.

But look behind the pictures and names. Glacier Clear Water, for example, doesn't come from a glacial source, but a municipal water supply—tap water, in other words—in Tennessee. That might look like Mt. Everest on the bottle of Everest Water, but inside is treated municipal water from somewhere in Texas. The story is similar for Aquafina and Dasani. Even when bottled water is not tap water, the rules are loose enough that “spring” water may actually come from wells or aquifers. Some bottled waters do come from mountain springs or glacial sources, but they are a minority.

Many people, suspicious of tap water, buy bottled because they think it's more natural, purer, more healthful, and better tasting. But the facts usually prove otherwise.

Bursting the bubble--The source.

It's not a negative that many bottled waters come from municipal water supplies—except that consumers may not realize they're spending \$5 or \$10 a week on bottled tap water. Municipal supplies are excellent sources of drinking water, and Americans (along with Canadians and people in most other industrialized nations) have a right to be proud of their public water systems.

Who is watching.

Tap water is strictly regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and monitored by municipal suppliers. Bottled water, in contrast, is regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) only if it is shipped across state lines or is imported. In some ways the FDA standards are weaker than the EPA's, and its testing far less frequent. In any case, most bottled water is packaged and sold within one state, so it's subject only to state regulation, which varies greatly—and in some states is nonexistent. California has some of the strictest regulations. Most bottlers belong to the International Bottled Water Association, a trade group that has its own guidelines, though it's hard to know how good such self-regulation is.

What researchers have found.

Several studies have found that while most bottled water is of high quality, some is out of line with the strict standards for tap water. A few years ago, for instance, a study comparing bottled waters with tap water from Cleveland found that one-quarter of the bottled waters had significantly higher bacterial counts than tap water. This doesn't mean that the bottled waters contained enough bacteria to cause illness, but enough to raise a red flag—and these findings certainly dispel the myth of the purity of bottled water.

What taste tests show.

In blind taste tests, most people can't tell the difference between bottled and tap. Sometimes plastic bottles can impart a slight plastic taste, leading some people to worry about chemical residues. The plastic bottles are safe, however.

Nutritional benefits?

Only “mineral water” (a tiny part of the bottled-water business) has extra nutrients, and even these minerals don’t add up to much. Tap water does usually have one important nutrient seldom found in the bottles—fluoride, which is added to most supplies to reduce cavities in children. Bottlers generally filter out the fluoride from municipal water.

The environment.

If you care about conservation of resources, tap water is by far the better choice. More than a million tons of plastic is used every year to make water bottles. It takes lots of energy to make, ship, and refrigerate the bottles—and energy production creates air pollution. Most of the plastic, which is not biodegradable, ends up clogging our landfills.

When bottled water is a good idea.

In some places, and at some times, bottled water is safer than tap—notably in the developing world, where the water supply is risky. Moreover, millions of Americans and Canadians get their water from unregulated private wells, which are more likely to be contaminated. On rare occasions water from a public utility temporarily becomes unsafe, in which case the utility must by law notify consumers and tell them what to do. (This may happen after flooding, as was seen after hurricane Katrina.) If your tap water is contaminated, however, your best long-term option is to filter it—that’s more convenient and cheaper than bottled water. The same is true if you know your water is high in lead (from plumbing pipes) or if your tap water simply has an off flavor or smell.