



Harris County Hospital District

Media Contact: Nicole Aguilar Benningfield
Office: 713-566-6761
Cell: 281-782-9518
Nicole_Aguilar@hchd.tmc.edu
On-call pager: 713-566-6430

MEDIA RELEASE

Gardening: An Unexpected Workout

HOUSTON (March 22, 2007) – Spring has arrived, and your yard is screaming for fertilizer and new plants. But before you go out to garden, don't forget to take some precautions. After all, gardening is a lot more than a hobby – it's exercise.

Depending on the activity, gardening can be as tough a workout as lifting weights or jogging. The toughest "workouts" include mowing the lawn with a push mower, shoveling, and tilling. Just an hour of gardening can burn as many calories as a brisk 3.5 mile walk.

"As in any form of exercise, it's important to stretch," said Dr. Blanca Fernandez, physician at Gulfgate Health Center and assistant professor of Family and Community Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine. "You may not need to stretch if you're planting a few seeds, but if you have plans to plant a tree or other rigorous gardening activities, stretching is important."

The most common gardening injuries are back strain and knee pain. If you spend time on your knees weeding, use a cushion, keep your back straight and don't sit on your heels. It's also good to stand up and stretch your legs every 10 minutes.

Not only can gardening work your small and large muscle groups, it can help your mental health also. "Many people find gardening relaxing," Fernandez said. "They enjoy the benefits of getting fresh air and working in the dirt and plants in their yard. Some people even find it healing."

Gardening can even protect your bones. A University of Arkansas clinical research study found gardening to be more effective than swimming, jogging, walking, or aerobics for protection from osteoporosis.

Other useful health and safety tips:

- Protect yourself from the sun – wear sunscreen and reapply every hour, wear sunglasses and a hat
- Know your equipment and use it as directed
- Wear safety glasses when trimming trees and shrubs
- Protect your hands and feet – wear gloves and don't garden barefoot
- When applying chemical pesticides, use caution – read directions and keep children and animals out of the garden until it's safe
- Keep harmful lawn and garden products, tools and equipment out of the reach of children

(more)

Page 2/Gardening as Exercise

- Stay hydrated – drink water, especially if it's warm outside
- Recognize problematic plants such as poison ivy, poison oak
- Take precautions to protect yourself against ticks, mosquitoes and bees, especially if you are allergic to any kind of insect bite
- Be aware of the signs of overexertion, such as breathlessness, fatigue and nausea

The Harris County Hospital District is the public health care system for the nation's third most-populous county. It provides more than 1.1 million health care visits each year to uninsured and underinsured residents of Harris County. The hospital district operates Ben Taub General Hospital, Lyndon B. Johnson General Hospital, Quentin Mease Community Hospital, 12 community health centers, a dental center, eight school-based clinics, 13 homeless shelter clinics and four mobile health units.

###