

# The Wellness Express™



Jump on the train to good health

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## Health Benefits of Gardening

Presented by:

### Introduction

Gardening is a popular outdoor pastime and a great activity for anyone interested in building better health. Gardening, which is particularly popular among older adults, is an excellent way to spend time in nature, beautify your environment and grow nutritious fruits, vegetables and herbs. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or CDC, gardening is an effectively way to stay in shape, too: 30 to 45 minutes of gardening can burn up to 150 calories!<sup>1</sup>



Maintaining a garden is a great way for people of all ages and abilities to stay active and active individuals are less likely to develop hypertension, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, heart disease, depression and other problems, notes the CDC. Your chiropractor can counsel you on how to use proper posture and technique to avoid excessive spine and joint strain when gardening. Your

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chiropractor understands the physical demands of gardening and can help you prevent injuries that may keep you from enjoying this health-positive activity.

### Benefit #1: Improved Physical Health

Gardening involves a variety of physical activities that challenge you to move your body in different ways and improve your strength and stamina. Common gardening tasks include raking, hoeing, digging, squatting, turning compost heaps, using a push mower or rototiller and lifting and hauling garden supplies - just a few of the activities that make gardening a serious workout. Caring for a garden is an ongoing opportunity to develop healthy habits that yield both short-term and lifelong physical health benefits.

The American Council on Exercise states that gardening is an effective form of resistance training and that performing moderate-intensity exercise such as gardening and walking help lower your risk for chronic disease.<sup>2</sup> Most people garden for fun, but scheduling regular gardening sessions - three times per week for 30 minutes to 1 hour - can yield excellent health benefits. Pulling weeds, raking and

### Exercise of the Week

Side Crunches on Exercise Ball

Difficulty: Moderate to Advanced

*(Consult your chiropractor before engaging in this or any other exercise.)*

**Start:** Lie on side over an exercise ball, so ribcage is positioned over top of ball. Put legs in a scissor position to stabilize lower body. Position lower arm across chest and upper arm behind/over your head, reaching for opposite ear.

**Exercise:** Engage inner abdominals first by bringing belly button inwards. Then, curl body sideways on the ball, reaching elbow toward hip. As you curl, focus on feeling in waist, and keep body positioned sideways on ball. Return to starting position. Repeat 5-15 times each side.



other upper body tasks works your arms, chest, back and shoulders, while other activities, such as haulings supplies in a wheelbarrow, work your lower body.

## Benefit #2: Enhanced Mental & Social Health

Gardening is associated with several significant mental and social health benefits, including high life satisfaction in older adults. According to a 2004 study published in the journal *Social Science and Medicine*, gardening - communal gardening, specifically - helps combat isolation in older individuals, helps older adults develop social networks and improves quality of life and emotional well-being in seniors.<sup>3</sup> But young people can reap the mental and social health benefits of gardening too. Gardening helps teach children and teens mental skills, such as multitasking, scheduling and planning and helps young people cultivate a sense of identity and belonging. Gardening is a way for youths to exercise their creativity as well. A garden is like a blank canvas ready to be painted and how a child or teen builds his or her garden reflects personal identity and artistic style.

## Benefit #3: Decreased Stress & Anxiety

Many people try gardening as a way to help them relax or manage stress and research evidence is now confirming what many people have known for decades about gardening's stress-busting potential. A 2011 study published in the *Journal of Health Psychology* states that gardening can encourage relief from acute stress and restore positive mood and is better at

doing both these things than indoor reading - another activity examined in the study.<sup>4</sup> Another study, published in 2004, notes that home gardens help reduce feelings of stress and that interacting with nature in a nurturing environment helps boost mental well-being.<sup>5</sup>



## Benefit #4: Access to Nutritious Foods

Tending a garden means having easy access to nutritious foods and gardeners may eat more fruits and vegetables - both rich in antioxidants - than non-gardeners. A 2008 study published in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* examined this very point and found that household participation in a community garden may indeed boost fruit and vegetable consumption in urban adults.<sup>6</sup> This goes for children gardeners too. First-graders who learn about nutrition in the classroom while growing vegetables outdoors in their own gardens have a greater willingness to taste those garden-grown vegetables, states 2001 study published in *California Agriculture*.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, gardening is a way to encourage healthier food consumption patterns in people of all ages.

Gardening is a healthful activity that yields many benefits but it is important that you remember to start off slowly to avoid muscles strains and soreness. Low back pain is one of the most common complaints among gardeners. Ask your chiropractor about helpful ways to prevent back pain while gardening.

## Quote to Inspire

*"If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need"*

*Marcus Tullius Cicero*

## References and Sources:

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