

House and garden work

Much of the work in running a house is stressful if you have back pain, but you can reduce the stresses and strains with the following adaptations to your home and with careful planning of tasks.

- **Kitchen** An ergonomically designed kitchen will pay dividends. For most jobs, a work top should be slightly lower than your elbow (*see below*). The sink needs to be at elbow height to avoid stooping when washing up. When standing at a sink or work top, rest one foot on a low stool or foot-rail.
- **Bathroom** Shavers should use a mirror to one side of the basin or an extendable mirror. When washing your hair, kneel down by the bath and



Standing at a work top

The work top should be 5 to 7cm (2 to 3in) lower than your elbow, so that you do not stoop over it. Stand as close as possible to it, and rest your hips against it.

use a shower hose. When bathing, avoid lying with your back in a rounded position for too long – getting out may be hard. Fit a hand-rail to the bath if you have chronic back trouble.

- **Washing clothes** Put the basket on a low chair before emptying the washing machine. Keep the washing line at a sensible height to avoid straining.
- **Ironing** Make sure the ironing board is at the right height (*see below*) to avoid stooping.
- **Bed making** Buy fitted sheets and duvets. Squat down or kneel by the bed when you tuck in the sheets. Install smooth-running casters.
- **Cleaning** Use long-handled implements and, where possible, kneel down to clean. Keep your spine straight instead of bending from the waist.



Ironing clothes

The ironing board should be low enough so that you do not have to bend your elbow at an angle of less than 90 degrees but high enough that you do not have to stoop.

Working in the garden

Many garden tasks involve crouching, bending or lifting. Try to work in an upright position, follow the lifting rules (*see pp. 148–49*) and change tasks often.

Shovelling earth



1 Keep your back as straight as possible and your knees bent. Slide the shovel along the ground, resting the back of your top hand against the inside of your knee or thigh.



2 When you have a spadeful, throw the soil to one side using a sideways movement, rather than lifting it first. Avoid using wheelbarrows because they are usually badly designed for backs. Don't dig when the soil is wet and heavy or hard, dry and compacted.

Work with good tools. If you can, use long-handled tools and kneel down to work. You could convert your garden to raised beds or grow plants in a greenhouse.

Digging the garden



1 Don't grip the spade too tightly and work at a steady pace. Push the spade into the ground using your body weight, not your muscle power.



2 Cut around the sides of each spadeful before you start to lift the soil. Hold the handle at the end and use the spade as a lever to ease out the soil. Raise the soil by holding the shaft of the spade near its base. Do not lift too much at one go, and turn it over as soon as you can.