



The season to be safe

Welcome to PhysioBiz, the newsletter that brings you interesting, useful and science-based information from the South African Society of Physiotherapy!

Are you on the road to holiday scenes, to days on the beach or time with grandparents and old friends back home? Or are you the one awaiting the guests, cleaning out spare rooms and counting the crockery?

It's a wonderful time of year, but there's another side to it: it's also a time when people experience injuries. "Very often this is because of doing things one isn't used to," says Rogier van Bever Donker, president of the South African Society of Physiotherapy (SASP). "It could be a sport or other activity they only really do on holiday, which places undue strain on muscles which haven't been exercised that often; it could be pushing furniture around or decorating a Christmas tree; or it could be travelling long distances on roads jam-packed with traffic."

We all know only too well the death toll exacted by holiday traffic, but what about the people involved in less terrible accidents, the bumper-bashers or sideswipes that take cars off the road and leave people with whiplash or other injuries? "The most common road traffic injuries are strains, sprains, dislocations, fractures and bruises," says van Bever Donker. "When a bone is broken, people get it set immediately, but all too often, they ignore the strains and minor pains. But something like a whiplash injury can have a long-term and debilitating impact. I'd urge road accident victims to see their physiotherapist as soon as possible, to assess their injuries and reduce the risk of future discomfort and pain."

Other activities which can cause injuries on holiday are 'luggage-related' – in 2013, for instance, 75,543 luggage-related injuries were recorded in the United States. Racing to catch buses or planes while hauling heavy suitcases can cause wrist and shoulder injuries; hauling cases up into overhead compartments can place undue strain on shoulders in particular.

Another category of injury noted in the US report for 2013 is ‘decorating injuries’ – falls from ladders while stringing ‘Welcome Home!’ signs across doorways, putting stars on top of Christmas trees or adding lights to the outdoor decorations, for example.

Some tips for avoiding holiday-related injuries include:

- Wear supportive footwear while travelling, cleaning house and decorating – something with a good non-slip sole;
- Opt for wheeled suitcases, and keep them easy to manoeuvre by not overstuffing them;
- When placing luggage in overhead compartments, try to avoid doing so while twisting your abdomen, and use both hands as much as possible to stabilise and hold the weight;
- When engaging in holiday sports and other physical activities, go slowly: start with an hour or less on Day One and gradually build up;
- At home when preparing for guests, ensure there are safe passages between the inevitable clutter as furniture is pushed around, things go into boxes for safekeeping, and guests arrive with luggage (this applies in holiday homes too);
- Electrical connections are inevitable with the kinds of gifts people want these days: ensure that cables are safe and not strung across places people will walk;
- When moving stuff and putting up decorations, ensure all equipment is in good nick and safe – for example, are ladder-rung solid and unbroken, and does the ladder have stable footing?
- Secure rugs with slip-resistant backing.

“Have a wonderful and injury-free festive season!” says van Bever Donker.

If you do need a physiotherapist during your holiday or afterwards, you can find one close by at www.saphysio.co.za.

References

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6247704/#!po=1.76471>

<https://www.reboundmd.com/news/common-holiday-injuries-and-safety-tips>