



### Health Tip: Lawnmower safety



According to the Insurance Information Institute, lawnmower injuries send approximately 75,000 people to the Emergency Department each year. Of this number, around 16,000 are under 19 years of age, with 600 of these young people sustaining amputations. Sadly, relatively few of these injuries are due to mechanical problems with the

lawnmower---most are the result of human error.

**How do lawnmower injuries occur?** One of the most common mechanisms involved in lawnmower injuries is attempting to unclog the cutting blade with the hand or foot. Other injuries occur because of improper mowing technique, such as pulling the mower backwards. Wearing improper clothing, like open toed sandals, or not wearing eye protection, are other common reasons for injuries sustained while mowing.

**What are some of the most common types of injuries?** Lawn mower injuries include deep cuts, loss of fingers and toes, broken bones, burns, and eye damage. Approximately one-fourth of lawnmower injuries involve the wrist, hand or finger and a slightly smaller percentage affect the foot, ankle, or toes. Eye damage from flying debris is a less common, but potentially sight-threatening, lawnmower-related injury. Injuries can occur not only to the lawnmower operator, but also to nearby individuals.

**How can mowing be made safer?** By taking special precautions, the great majority of lawnmower injuries can be prevented. The [Consumer Product Safety Commission](http://www.consumerproduct.gov)

offers these suggestions for safer use of power lawnmowers:

- Read the owner's manual to become familiar with the workings of the machine. Keep the manual in a safe place so it will be handy the next time you need it.
- Fill the fuel tank before starting the engine to cut the lawn. Never refuel the mower when it is running or while the engine is hot.
- Check the lawn for debris (twigs, rocks and other objects) before mowing the lawn. Objects have been struck by the mower blade and thrown out from under the mower, resulting in severe injuries and deaths. Wearing eye protection is advised.
- Don't cut the grass when it's wet. Wet clippings can clog the discharge chute, jamming the rotary blade and causing the engine to shut down. When you need to remove clippings from the chute, the motor must be stopped.
- Wear sturdy shoes with sure-grip soles when using the mower, never sneakers, sandals or with bare feet. Slacks rather than shorts offer better protection for the legs.
- If the lawn slopes, mow across the slope with the walk-behind rotary mower, never up and down. With a riding mower, drive up and down the slope, not across it.
- Don't remove any safety devices on the mower. Remember that the safety features were installed to help protect you against injury. Check safety features often and repair or replace if needed.
- With an electric mower, organize your work so you first cut the area nearest the electrical outlet, then gradually move away. This will minimize chances of your running over the power cord and being electrocuted.

In addition to the above suggestions, the American Academy

of Pediatrics advises that children younger than 16 years should not be allowed to use ride-on mowers and children younger than 12 years should not use walk-behind mowers. Additionally, children should never be allowed to ride as passengers on riding mowers. Prior to mowing, make sure that children are indoors or at a safe distance away from the area to be mowed.

Obviously, the main source of danger with lawnmowers is the blade. Never insert hands or feet into the mower to remove grass or debris. With the motor off (and some suggest disconnecting the spark plug wire) use a stick or broom handle to remove any obstruction. It is highly recommended to use only those lawnmowers that have an automatic brake. This feature, required on all new mowers, stops the blade in three seconds when the operator releases his/her grip on the handle-mounted control bar.

If you have any questions about lawnmower safety, please log into your account and send us your question. We are glad to help.

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