

Weekend Doctor

By Dr. Thomas F. Vail

Lawn care season is back and I caution homeowners to protect their feet and the feet of those around them when using rotary-blade lawnmowers.

Each year, about 25,000 Americans sustain injuries from power mowers, according to the U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission.

Yet, each year I continue to see patients who have been hurt while operating a lawnmower barefoot or wearing flip-flops.

While electric mowers seem more dangerous because there is electricity involved, people even suffer injuries from just using a manual push model.

Children younger than 14 and adults older than 44 are more likely to be injured from mowers than others.

Anyone who operates a lawnmower should take a few simple precautions to avoid injuries or accidents:

- Don't mow a wet lawn. Losing control from slipping on rain-soaked grass is the leading cause of foot injuries caused by power mowers.

- Before starting to mow, take a good look around your garden and search it for sticks, rocks, toys, or dog bones, as these can all damage your mower. In addition, hitting these objects can cause the mower to veer out of control and cause serious injury.

- Goggles or other eye protection should be worn to protect foreign objects like stones from coming in contact with the blades, being thrown up and striking your eyes.

- If your mower strikes a foreign object, turn it off immediately, disconnect the power supply, and make sure the blades have stopped rotating before checking for any damage.

- Wear heavy shoes or work boots when mowing. No sneakers or sandals! Flimsy footwear like flip-flops put your feet at the most risk for injury. Steel-toe cap boots are preferable.

- Don't let small children ride on the lap of an adult on a lawn tractor. Children can be severely injured by the blades when getting on or off the machine

- If you leave your lawnmower for any length of time, turn the engine off and remember to take the key with you.

- Mow across slopes instead of up or down them to avoid falling or injuring yourself.

- Mow by pushing the mower away from you. Never pull a running mower backwards.

- Never mow over gravel.

- Keep children away from the lawn when mowing.

- When operating a power mower, keep the clip bag attached to prevent projectile injuries.

- Use a mower with a release mechanism on the handle that automatically shuts it off when your hands let go.

- Don't smoke when using a gasoline mower. Keep all ignition sources away from the mower and the fuel supply.

- Buy a mower that has a residual current device fitted. Should you inadvertently cut through a cable, this will immediately cut off the electricity supply.

- Always clean a mower after you use it, store it in a safe place, and keep it well maintained.

If a mower accident does occur, immediate treatment is necessary to flush the wound thoroughly and apply antibiotics to prevent infection.

While superficial wounds can be treated on an outpatient basis, more serious injuries usually require surgery to deep-clean the wound and close it, or repair tendon damage.



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