

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 lawn mowers.

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 lawn mower barefoot or wearing flip-flops.

Children under the age of 14 and adults over the age of 44 are more likely to be injured from mowers than others.

Anyone who operates a lawn mower 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, look for sticks, rocks, toys or dog bones, as these can damage your mower and cause it to veer out of control.

- Goggles or other eye protection should be worn to protect foreign objects from being thrown up by the blades 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 lawn mower for any length of time, turn the engine off and take the key with you.

- Mow across slopes instead of up or down them to avoid falls or injuries.

- 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 petrol 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 to repair tendon damage.

Vail is with Advanced Footcare Clinic, Findlay. Questions for Blanchard Valley Health System doctors may be sent to weekend@thecourier.com, or to Weekend, The Courier, P.O. Box 609, Findlay, OH 45839.