

Snowblower and Lawnmower Injuries

Snowblowers and lawnmowers can cause severe damage to the hands and fingers. These injuries often occur when the user tries to remove an object that is “stuck” in the machine. Snowblowers and lawnmowers must be handled properly to avoid injury.

Safety Tips

1. Never put your hand or fingers near the moving parts or intake or output areas of snowblowers or lawnmowers. If there is an object in the way of any part of the machine, the machine must be turned off and the spark plug disconnected (or power cord unplugged for electric models) before attempting to remove the object. Only then should the object be removed with a tool, stick, or even a broom handle and *not* the hand or fingers or foot. Protect eyes from flying debris that may result.
2. When being moved or picked up, snowblowers and lawnmowers should also be turned off, spark plug disconnected, and unplugged.
3. Do not try to lift a machine from the bottom; even if a lawnmower is not running, the blades are sharp enough to cause serious injury.
4. Wear non-slip, closed-toe shoes to prevent slipping under the machine.
5. Never allow children to operate or be near the machine while in use.

Injuries

If you suffer a snowblower or lawnmower injury, *seek medical attention immediately*, even for seemingly small injuries.

Snowblower and lawnmower injuries may be mild or extremely severe. Small wounds or cuts can harbor unsafe bacteria. Infections are common and antibiotic medicines usually are necessary. More severe injuries can lead to multiple finger amputations. Save all body parts in a small plastic bag and place the bag on ice, then go to the closest emergency room.

Treatment

Frequently, several surgeries are needed to clean wounds and repair damaged tissues. Many months of hand therapy are usually necessary to maximize movement and function. In cases of severe injury, normal use of the hand is never recovered.

Prognosis

While advances in surgery with a microscope have improved the results of replanted fingers and hands, function is never back to normal. If the fingers are too severely crushed and damaged, they might be beyond repair. Prevention is still the best treatment.

More information and safety tips are available at www.assh.org.

Figure 1. After the machine is turned off and unplugged, any obstruction should be removed with a tool and not the hand or fingers.

