

FAQ How can I keep yard work safe? By Raymond E. Peart, M.D.

As the temperatures continue to increase this summer, so too does the number of hand injuries that occur from lawn mowing and yard work. I thought it would be appropriate to discuss general safety measures to prevent these injuries from occurring.

When the grass chute of your lawn mower appears to be clogged, particularly with wet grass, it is critical to shut the mower off before trying to clear the grass out. If possible, use a stick or broom handle to clean out the chute instead of using your hands. Even if you use some sort of instrument to unclog the chute but still leave the mower on, there is still a chance that the tool will jam into your hand.



When operating power equipment such as a hedge trimmer, always use two hands and make sure it feels comfortable and balanced in your hands. If you do not hold your power equipment properly, you could end up with finger lacerations, particularly to the tips of fingers. Always wear heavy duty non-slip gloves to protect your fingers when operating your equipment. If an accident does occur, the gloves will lessen the trauma to the fingers. Wearing gloves will also minimize vibration which won't leave them feeling so numb and achy afterwards. This vibration can cause a range of conditions in the long term including carpal tunnel. Always be sure to see an orthopedic hand sub-specialist for proper treatment if an injury does occur.

FAQ - What is an Achilles tendon rupture?

By Alan Tuckman, M.D.

The Achilles tendon, the largest and strongest tendon in the body, is a strong fibrous cord that connects the muscles in the back of your calf to your heel bone. If you overstretch your Achilles tendon, it can tear. Those who suffer this injury are typically "weekend warriors" who are active intermittently and have had no previous injury or problem reported in the affected leg.

This is a common injury this time of the year as warm weather approaches because the condition often develops in people who exercise infrequently and those who are just beginning an exercise program. As you age, soft tissues become less elastic and degenerative changes begin to occur in the tendon, leading to a situation where the tendon is weaker than normal. Combine this with inactivity over the winter months and you could possibly suffer from an Achilles tendon rupture. It is important for people who are just starting to exercise to stretch properly, start slowly, and increase gradually. The key is to stay active year round.



For those that are unfortunate and do sustain a rupture, you may notice a lump in the back of the ankle prior to the rupture. Pain may suddenly be present, especially as you walk. An individual who ruptures his or her Achilles tendon should seek prompt medical treatment.

FAQ – How can trampoline injuries be prevented?

By Brian J. Keener, M.D.

Trampoline injuries are very common this time of year as children spend their summer days outside. Falling off a trampoline or using a trampoline incorrectly can result in strains, sprains, fractures and other injuries for both children and adults. In fact, the risk of injury is so high that the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) says that trampolines should never be used at home or in outdoor playgrounds and should be limited to use in supervised training programs such as in gymnastics or diving classes.

If you choose to buy a trampoline despite the risks, follow these safety rules from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission:

- Install a trampoline enclosure — a special net designed to surround the trampoline.
- Make sure shock-absorbing pads cover the trampoline's springs, hooks and frame.
- Place the trampoline on level ground. Make sure it is a safe distance from trees and other structures.
- Allow only one person to use the trampoline at a time — and never without supervision.
- Don't allow somersaults on the trampoline.

It is very important to make sure there is only one person jumping at a time. The majority of trampoline injuries occur when multiple people are jumping, especially of different ages. It is usually the person smallest or lightest in weight that ends up getting injured in this situation. Wrist sprains and fractures are common when kids try to break their fall, so be sure that persistent wrist pain gets evaluated by an orthopedic upper extremity sub-specialist. An unrecognized injury may cause persistent or worsening problems if not treated appropriately.

FAQ - How can I prevent back pain from limiting my activities?

By I. Stanley Porter, M.D.

Wonderful weather and bright clear skies entice golfers, basketball players and gardeners to enjoy the outdoors. Unfortunately many of these “weekend warriors” suffer back injuries as they get their golf or basketball games back in full swing or begin spring cleanup around the yard. Most of these lower back related injuries are caused from strains or sprains of the lower back musculature. Muscle strain is often caused by overuse of a muscle or overloading a muscle. When a muscle is stressed beyond its limits, injury occurs. To avoid injuring your lower back, it is important to stretch before and after activity. Muscles which have been on “winter vacation” are often weakened by inactivity over the winter. Not only is it beneficial to do exercises that target your back, but it is also important to remember to stretch and strengthen your leg muscles to prevent back injuries when lifting or twisting.

If you do suffer from lower back pain after activity, treatment is similar to other sports injuries. Ice the injury initially and maintain range of motion to increase your flexibility. Treat the pain with anti-inflammatory medication to help to reduce muscle swelling and discomfort. Ninety percent of overexertion injuries will resolve with conservative care. If after 7-10 days of self-care you are still experiencing severe, debilitating pain, medical attention should be considered to make sure you are not suffering from a compression fracture, disc herniation, spinal instability or other serious health problem requiring more intensive care.

FAQ - How should non-traumatic shoulder pain be handled?

By Gregg J. Fasulo, M.D.

Summer is known to bring warm weather but it can also bring shoulder pain to many people. Shoulder pain is frequently caused by overuse of the shoulder as well as repetitive overhead activities. Whether your pain was brought on by doing yard work, washing windows, or from playing a few matches of tennis, it should not be ignored and early treatment can prevent further injury and chronic shoulder issues.

Very rarely is the source of the pain a tear; it can usually be attributed to the irritation of muscles or tendons.

Typical treatment of shoulder pain involves a combination of rest, anti-inflammatory medication, applying cold or heat to the shoulder joint and Physical Therapy. Shoulder strengthening exercises can prevent the injury from reoccurring and it is important to be diligent with them. If the pain does not subside with conservative treatment, then you should seek a proper diagnosis from a qualified physician. Your physician may order diagnostic tests such as an MRI or x-rays to help determine the root of your shoulder pain. A corticosteroid injection will not fix the injury; it will only alleviate pain and mask symptoms so it should be used very conservatively. Surgery may be required when the pain doesn't improve with conservative treatment. This should be done arthroscopically



so that there are smaller incisions, less tissue damage and a shorter recovery time. Shoulder conditions can include biceps tendonitis, rotator cuff tendonitis, labral tear, frozen shoulder, tendon tears and instability.

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FAQ - How can I avoid a rotator cuff tear while operating power equipment?

By Timothy P. Tymon, M.D.

This is the time of year when I begin to see a considerable amount of rotator cuff injuries caused by someone yanking too hard on the pull-cord to start their lawn mower or chainsaw. The rotator cuff is made up of muscles and tendons that connect the arm bone to the shoulder blade, which help stabilize and move the shoulder. A rotator cuff may be torn from a single traumatic injury but more often it occurs as a result from wear and tear. In general, rotator cuff tears occur more commonly in people over the age of 40. Most of the time, a partial rotator cuff injury can heal on its own with self-care measures or physical therapy.

When operating power equipment that has pull-cord issues, avoid overpowering the problem with force and straining your shoulder. Try a few other techniques to solve the issue, such as applying spray lubricant to the cord and slowly pulling the cord in and out. Also check to see if the spring coil needs to be replaced. It is important to get your equipment serviced on a regular basis and keep up with maintenance to avoid issues with the equipment themselves as well as any injuries to your arm or shoulder. If you do happen to injure your rotator cuff, be sure to apply ice, take anti-inflammatory medication, and avoid straining your shoulder. If the pain still persists after a week or two, see your orthopedic shoulder sub-specialist for an evaluation.