

ADULT HEALTH BULLETIN



MAY 2023

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: GARDENING SAFELY



The warm spring weather has many people excited to get outside and begin seasonal yard and garden work. Gardening is a great way to be physically active, enjoy the outdoors, and beautify your home or yard. There are added health benefits to growing your own vegetables, fruit, and herbs, as well. As with any activity though, it is important to know how to move prudently, use equipment properly, and interact with nature responsibly.

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), more than 400,000 people visit emergency rooms each year for injuries related to outdoor

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garden tools. It is important to stay safe when working with outdoor tools. The American Society of Surgeons of the Hand (ASSH) recommends taking the following precautions when gardening:

- **Wear gardening gloves:** Wearing the proper gloves will help reduce blistering and protect your skin from chemicals, bacteria, and fungi that live in the soil. Hands and fingers are prone to small cuts and scrapes that can become easily infected when exposed to dirt and germs. Leather gloves protect against thorns, poisonous plants, insect and animal bites, and other skin irritants in the garden. Gloves also prevent sun damage.
- **Avoid strenuous repetitive motions:** Unless you are used to the activity, repetitive motions such as digging, raking, trimming hedges, pruning bushes, or planting bulbs may cause muscle or skin damage. Rotate gardening activities every 15 minutes with a brief rest in between so the same muscles are not overused.
- **Be aware of your grip:** Grip strength is at its maximum when the wrist is in a relaxed or neutral position. Studies have shown that people lose up to 25% of their grip strength when their wrist is bent. Only use hand tools with the appropriate hand, for example, do not grip a right-handed tool with your left hand. Try to square up your shoulders in front of where you are working instead of reaching across your body.
- **Use proper equipment and tools:** Use a hand shovel or rake rather than your hands for digging. Sharp objects and debris buried in the soil may cut you. If possible, remove clear sharp objects like broken glass, old labelling stakes, and unused tools from the work area before beginning the task to avoid causing damage. Additionally, avoid accidents by using tools for their intended purposes only.

Other important tool tips:

- When purchasing pruners, loppers, or shears, look for pairs that feature a safety lock.



- Avoid products with form-fitting handles. These tools only fit one size of hand perfectly. If your hand is too large or too small, it will put more stress on your hand.
- Always follow the manufacturer's instructions for the tool.
- Keep sharp tools away from children at all times.
- Always unplug electrical tools and power off gas-powered motors when not in use.

If you do end up with an injury, keep the following guidelines in mind to know when to seek emergency medical care. Seek medical attention immediately if:

- Continuous pressure does not stop the bleeding after 15 minutes.
- You notice persistent numbness or tingling in the fingertip or have trouble moving the finger.
- You are unsure of your tetanus immunization status.
- You are unable to thoroughly clean the wound by rinsing with a mild soap and plenty of clean water.

REFERENCE:

<https://www.assh.org/handcare/safety/gardening>

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