

## Let it Snow but Let Safety Be First!

Chicagoland's weather can be frightful during these winter months. We are certainly familiar with blistery conditions and snow-covered thoroughfares, walkways and driveways that necessitate snow removal. A snow removal method that requires caution and the utmost in safety is snow blowing/snow throwing. When using a snow blower or snow thrower to clear/remove snow, there are some critical safety tips that warrant reminding to ensure safe usage.

Every winter OAD Orthopaedics cares for individuals who sustain severe injuries to their fingers and/or whole hand due to snow blower accidents. The American Society for Surgery of the Hand reports that each year hundreds of people suffer maiming or amputations of their fingers and/or hands as a result of improper handling of snow blowers. To heighten awareness, OAD deems it worthwhile to remind everyone of important measures for snow blower/snow thrower safety and injury prevention.

Snow blowers are, in fact, safe tools. Used properly, this efficient and effective technology saves an extraordinary amount of backbreaking work. The average profile of persons sustaining snow blower/snow thrower injuries are males in their 40's. Further, the most common injury is amputation of the tips of fingers, usually on the injured's dominant hand.

Heavy wet snow or debris can clog a snow blower/snow thrower's exit chute. The machine chute jams and the equipment bogs down or stops functioning. Often, the immediate response involves a dangerous attempt to clear the chute with one's hand. **DO NOT** clear the chute or discharge snow/debris with your hand(s).

If a snow blower/snow thrower clogs or gets jammed, OAD emphasizes following these safety guidelines:

1. Immediately turn off the equipment, keeping hands and feet away from any chutes and moving parts.
2. Wait several seconds (at least 5-10 seconds) after turning the machine off to allow the blades to completely stop rotating.
3. Use a rigid stick or broom handle to loosen impacted snow or debris.
4. Never put your hand(s) down a chute or around any machinery blades. Many people are of the misconception that if a snow blower/snow thrower is turned off, it is safe to insert their hands. This is not true. If snow/debris has jammed the blades, dislodging the matter can allow the blades to disengage and rotate across your hand(s).
5. Once snow/debris has been safely dislodged from the chute and blades with the use of a rigid stick or broom handle, the machine can be re-started.

OAD's physicians and clinicians urge equipment operators to heed the above safety tips. These guidelines can save you from a very unfortunate, potentially life-altering injury.

Always remember: Safety First!

*This article was submitted by OAD Orthopaedics, a subspecialty orthopaedic group with 23 physicians at 6 convenient locations in Warrenville, Bartlett, Carol Stream, Glen Ellyn, Naperville and Wheaton. Teams of specialists provide premier surgical and nonsurgical care for injuries and conditions related to the shoulder,*

*hip, and knee; foot and ankle; hand/upper extremity; spine-back and neck; sports medicine; joint replacement/reconstruction; physical medicine and rehabilitation/physiatry; and workers' compensation. Full service, state-of-the-art OAD facilities provide comprehensive on-site services including diagnostic testing/MRI, physical and occupational therapy services. For appointments and information, call (630) 225-BONE (2663), and visit OAD online at [www.OADortho.com](http://www.OADortho.com).*