



# WINTER IS HERE:

*Are Your Patients Prepared?*

By Thomas Gillon, MD

**W**e may have to wait another three months for winter to return to HBO's *Game of Thrones*; however, winter is currently knocking on (and soon to be barreling through) our front door.

We have learned from our great first president, General Washington, and his soldiers to be prepared for a harsh winter in the greater Philadelphia area. As Jack Frost blows in from the north, Pennsylvania physicians can expect to see many patients with weather-related injuries and ailments. From slips on the ice to slips of the knife, we at the Philadelphia Hand to Shoulder Center see a dramatic increase in volume of patients with hand, wrist, arm, elbow and shoulder injuries during this time of the year.

## **ACCIDENTS WILL HAPPEN, BUT THERE ARE CERTAIN PRECAUTIONS WE CAN ALL SHARE WITH OUR PATIENTS TO HELP PREVENT SOME INJURIES.**

### **SNOW & ICE**

While snow-laden fields may be picturesque, more often than not we are subject to an icy, wintery mix here in the greater Philadelphia area. If you must venture out on an icy path, then you should be extra cautious to avoid slips

and falls that could injure your hands, arms, elbows and shoulders. Ideally pretreatment of paths and steps with salt may lead to fewer accidents. Always use a handrail when going up or down steps, especially when they may be icy. Also, be careful when shoveling snow. Various injuries to hands, wrists, arms, elbows and shoulders like strains and tears can be caused by shoveling heavy, wet snow or using a repetitive motion to chip away ice on your driveways or sidewalks. Always use caution to avoid injury.

Probably one of the most devastating injuries to a hand is a snow blower injury. Each winter the hand surgeons at Philadelphia Hand to Shoulder Center are referred patients from all over the tri-state area with snow blower injuries. We often spend many hours in the operating room replanting amputated fingers and repairing mangled hands. Unfortunately, these injuries can cause severe soft tissue and bone damage that replantation is not possible – sometimes leading to multiple finger amputations.

Fortunately, these injuries are completely preventable.

- Understand how your snow blower works. Most snow blower injuries occur because the blades get clogged with wet heavy snow and the operator didn't know that their snow blower had two sets of blades—a two-stage snow blower. The second set of blades at the bottom of the chute propels

the snow up and out of the chute. When the unsuspecting plower places a hand in the chute to clear stuck snow, he or she could be off to the ER.

- Remember, even if the power is off, once the blades are unclogged they may rotate with enough force to amputate a finger.
- Never operate your snow blower after drinking alcohol or using sedatives/narcotics.
- Never operate when others are near that could slip or slide into the blades.

If your snow blower is clogged:

- Turn the engine OFF
- Disengage the clutch
- Wait for all blades to stop moving
- Never declog the blades with your hands or your feet! Most blowers come equipped with a declogging utensil or use a stick

Tips on how to keep your snow blower from clogging:

- Spray the blades and chute with cooking oil
- Plow multiple times if accumulation is expected to be deep or the snow is expected to be heavy.

## KNIFE SAFETY

Spending more time indoors during the winter often means spending more time in the kitchen. Every year thousands of Americans cut their fingers with kitchen knives.

Whether you are carving a brisket, turkey or ham, here are some safety tips to consider.

- Keep your knives sharp. A dull knife is more likely to slip, requires more force to cut, and yet is still sharp enough to cut a human finger. An electric oscillating knife is a safer choice when carving meat.
- Never place your hand under the object being cut, i.e. a roll or bagel.
- Never try to catch the carved meat with the other hand. Always slice away from your free stabilizing hand.
- Keep the food prep area dry to prevent slippage. If the object to be cut is slippery, try stabilizing it with a dishcloth with your free hand.
- Try to be free of any known possible distractions when wielding a knife. Don't watch TV while chopping vegetables, etc.

If you cut your finger or hand, wash the wound with soapy water and then apply direct pressure with a clean cloth. Most hand and finger wounds will stop bleeding with direct pressure.

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Seek immediate medical assistance if:

- The cut doesn't stop bleeding after 15 minutes of direct pressure.
- You are unsure if your tetanus shot is up to date.
- You are unable to thoroughly clean the wound with soap and water.

Schedule to see a board-certified hand surgeon within a few days if:

- You feel numbness in your fingers.
- You are unable to bend or straighten the finger(s).

**THANKS FOR SHARING THESE TIPS TO HELP KEEP  
YOUR PATIENTS' HANDS, WRISTS, ARMS, ELBOWS  
AND SHOULDERS SAFE FROM INJURIES IN 2019!**

*A member of the renowned Philadelphia Hand to Shoulder Center physician team, Thomas J. Gillon, MD is a Board Certified Orthopaedic Surgeon, fellowship trained in Hand and Upper Extremity Surgery. He is on staff at Temple-Jeanes Hospital, Holy Redeemer Hospital and Thomas Jefferson University Hospital. A native of the Philadelphia area, Dr. Gillon welcomes new patients at his office in Rockledge. To schedule an appointment with Dr. Gillon call 1-800-385-PHSC. For more information about Philadelphia Hand to Shoulder Center visit Hand2Shoulder.com.*