

Food for Thought - Hand Safety in the Kitchen



By Meredith N. Osterman, M.D., Orthopaedic Hand Surgeon, Philadelphia Hand to Shoulder Center

Also, overuse and repetitive stress injuries from food prep can inflame and damage the tendons in your fingers and wrists. If you're doing a lot of food preparation all at once, such as cutting multiple pounds of potatoes, be sure to take frequent breaks to give your hands a rest.

What If You're Injured?

If you do cut yourself during food preparation, apply pressure to the laceration using a clean cloth. If the injury isn't serious, it will

stop bleeding in about 15 minutes. If the bleeding continues longer than that or if you lose feeling, you should seek medical attention. If the bleeding is profuse, the wound is deep, or if you suffer a puncture wound, consider it a medical emergency and call 911.

Cooking for your family and friends can be one of the most rewarding experiences. Just make sure you're careful and take the proper precautions to avoid accidents.

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Even chefs with world-class knife skills sometimes slice and dice a finger instead of the vegetable they meant to chop. If you're a home cook, amateur baker, or backyard barbecue connoisseur, the dangers lurking around the kitchen are just as real for you.

Lacerations from knives make up the majority of hand injuries that doctors see in the emergency room, and many of these happen in the kitchen. In fact, food prep is one of the most danger-prone activities around the house, based on the number of injuries treated in ERs and ORs.

With a little extra care and awareness around the kitchen, you can avoid many of those painful accidents that could lead to stitches, surgery, and a stay in the hospital.

Dangers in Plain Sight

Kitchen knives obviously have the potential to cause injury, but the real danger associated with them may be hard to spot since it's somewhat counter-intuitive. Studies have shown that sharper knives are actually safer than dull ones.

Sharper knives cut more efficiently, so they lower your risk for injury by reducing the number of cuts you have to make during the preparation process. You also apply less force with sharper knives, which means that what you're cutting is less likely to move and expose your finger to the blade instead.

Other blades around the house, like those found in blenders and garbage disposals, can cause significant injuries and even amputations in a blink of an eye. Never try to clean or clear a jam when these machines are on or plugged in.

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