

Turkey Carving Hand Safety

Although there has recently been some buzz surrounding a potential turkey shortage this season, early surveys suggest that nearly 50 million turkeys will still be prepared across the country this Thanksgiving.

Since the development of three safe and effective COVID-19 [vaccines](#), and with booster shots readily available, families are planning to safely gather for the first in-person Thanksgiving celebrations in two years. Potatoes will be mashed, pies will be baked, and turkeys will be carved.

The influx of cooking and turkey carving on Thanksgiving typically results in an increase in emergency department visits across the country – one of these reasons is due to turkey carving mishaps. Some of the common mistakes people tend to make include not using a sturdy cutting board or table, carving toward your body as opposed to away from it, consuming alcohol prior to or while carving, or never before carving a turkey and not knowing the proper technique.

Mary Elizabeth Rashid, MD, Hand and Upper Extremity Surgeon, OSF HealthCare

“Many injuries are superficial. You may cut your finger a little bit, it bleeds for a few minutes, you hold some pressure, wash it with soap and water, and it gets better. Most injuries are to the fingertips. I’ve done it myself when cutting different vegetables. That would be the least severe, then ranging to severity to where people can lose parts of the fingers.” (:24)

If a mishap leads to a minor, superficial cut, make sure you clean and treat the wound [properly](#) and as soon as possible. However, while an array of hand injuries can occur, and a lot of them can be easily treated at home, Dr. Rashid says the most common type of turkey carving injury can actually be quite serious.

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“The most common knife-related injuries tend to be to the flexor tendons of the fingers. Not only do those require surgical attention, but they require weeks to months of rehabilitation with a certified therapist to get those working again.” (:17)

It is important to practice safe turkey carving in order to avoid Thanksgiving mishaps in the kitchen. Dr. Rashid recommends taking specific precautions to avoid spending your Thanksgiving in the emergency department.

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“A couple tips in terms of turkey carving would be to, number one, always make sure you are cutting away from yourself using the hand to support the surface you are cutting on, but making sure that it is away from any cutting utensils. Make sure that your utensils are always sharp. If you can use an electric knife, that can help prevent finger injuries.” (:24)

Dr. Rashid says that, when handled properly, a sharper carving utensil actually allows for smoother, safer carving. Furthermore, Dr. Rashid strongly advises not to allow children to handle sharp knives.

So all of the proper precautions are followed but an injury still occurs. At what point should you seek medical attention?

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“Anything that looks particularly deep in and around the fingers, especially if there is any numbness or tingling involved, bleeding that cannot be stopped, or any loss in range of motion in and around the hand or the fingers should be seen by a medical professional.” (:17)

If you or a loved one experiences a kitchen mishap this Thanksgiving that requires emergent medical attention, go to your nearest emergency department or call 911.