

Turkey Carving Hand Safety

Emergency departments across the country tend to see an influx of patients on Thanksgiving each year. A common reason for a holiday trip to the emergency room (ER) is turkey carving mishaps. Some common mistakes people tend to make include not using a sturdy cutting board or table, carving toward their body as opposed to away from it, consuming alcohol prior to or while carving, or never carving a turkey before, therefore not knowing the proper technique.

“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,” says Dr. Mary Elizabeth Rashid, an OSF HealthCare fellowship-trained hand and upper extremity surgeon.

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

“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,” Dr. Rashid warns.

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 ER.

“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 be 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,” says Dr. Rashid.

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 a turkey carving mishap still occurs at your Thanksgiving gathering. At what point should someone seek medical attention?

“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 evaluated by a medical professional,” Dr. Rashid advises.

If you or a loved one experiences a carving injury - or any other kitchen mishap - this Thanksgiving that requires emergent medical attention, go to your nearest ER or call 911.