

Avoid Avocado Hand

Summer is a season of barbeques and grilling. This includes plenty of fresh fruits and veggies, specifically the summer staple: avocados. Whether it is guacamole, avocado toast, or a summer salad, avocados are particularly popular during this time of year. Because of their popularity, avocado-related injuries are also quite common. According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), nearly 9,000 people went to the emergency department in 2018 due to avocado mishaps.

“One of the things that happens with people is that when they go to cut their avocados for guacamole, they hold the avocado in their hand with one hand and then they use a paring knife, which is sharp, in the other hand. And as that paring knife hits the pit of the avocado, they slip and then the tip of the knife plunges into the hand and can cause damage to nerves and to tendons,” said Ramsey Ellis, M.D., fellowship-trained hand surgeon, OSF HealthCare.

The ripeness of the fruit plays a role in the extent of the injury as well. Many people cannot gauge the level of ripeness of the fruit until they slice into the tough outer layer. And although it is known as “avocado hand,” Dr. Ellis explains that similar injury can occur when cutting other fruits and veggies as well.

“The same thing happens with lemons and limes where folks are cutting them with the fruit in the palm of their hand and then the knife slips. So a really important summer cooking safety tip is to always place the lime, the avocado on the cutting board, stabilize around the fruit or vegetable with your hand and then use the knife on top so that your hand is not underneath where your knife is operating,” said Dr. Ellis.

“Avocado hand” injuries can range from minor cuts to something that requires surgery.

“It can be a simple laceration of the hand for which you should, if it’s a deep enough laceration, go to the urgent care or to the emergency department so that the wound can be irrigated and repaired. And that’s simple, simple recovery all the way to injuring a tendon. The tendons are what helps you bend your fingers and so once you cut one of those, you may have a finger that doesn’t bend or stays outstretched. And sometimes people also injure nerves, so you may end up with a numb spot on one of your fingers after that knife cuts the skin,” Dr. Ellis explained.

Because avocados are rich in nutrients and healthy fats, Dr. Ellis does not recommend avoiding them altogether, but she says the key to avoiding “avocado hand” is the proper cutting technique.

“Two tips for avocado lovers this summer. One: always cut with your knife below your holding hand, so stabilize the fruit and cut down. And the other thing is consider buying a special implement to cut and pit avocados. There are a variety of special tools on the market that are between three and five dollars that allow you to safely cut and then stab the pit of an avocado and remove it, and that can prevent a lot of injury,” Dr. Ellis said.

If you do slice your hand, apply pressure to the wound immediately. The fastest and safest way to get the care you need is by going to your nearest urgent care or emergency department. If the injury is severe, call 911.