

Tips to give you an edge Staying Safe - Be sharp about slicing, careful when cutting

By ANN S. KIM, Staff Writer

There's plenty of slicing, dicing, chopping and mincing that needs to be done before families and friends sit down to carve the turkey that's usually at the center of the Thanksgiving holiday feast.

A few knife tips can help keep the kitchen chores accident-free.

"The most dangerous thing about a knife is the person using it," observed Cliff Collins, owner of Cliff's Meat Market in Carrboro.

Collins reminds you to always cut away from yourself and others.

Make sure to have clean hands free of turkey grease or any other slippery substances that can make you lose your grip on the knife or on the item you're cutting, said Collins, who has been cutting meat for more than 30 years.

"I've had all kinds of people tell me they didn't listen to me," he said. "I've had people say, 'My hand was oily, it slipped and I split my finger open.' "

And while it might seem counter-intuitive to some, a dull knife is more dangerous than a sharp one. Regular use of a sharpening steel can keep the knife work going smoothly.

The edge of a knife gets out of alignment with use. A sharpening steel doesn't actually sharpen a blade, Collins said, but helps keep the edge true.

For the average home cook, Joel Goldfarb, owner of Chez Bay Gourmet cooking school in Durham, recommends at least annual professional sharpening for top-line knives. A properly sharpened knife should slice through a turkey, even an overcooked one, like butter, he said.

Some other safety tips might seem like common sense, but are often forgotten when the kitchen gets busy, Goldfarb said.

The cutting surface should be clear of anything except what's being cut, he said.

The cutting board needs to be properly grounded so it doesn't slip around. Goldfarb recommends placing sheets of rubbery shelf liner between cutting boards and countertops. Those makeshift mats can be washed if they get dirty, he said.

As for the actual cutting, it's best to hold the item with your fingers curved inward, Goldfarb said. That position gives you a good grip on the food while keeping the fingertips out of the knife's path.

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