

Let's Talk Turkey: 6 Safety Pitfalls to Avoid on Thanksgiving

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Whether you're preparing a Thanksgiving feast or tossing the football in the backyard, keep these tips in mind to avoid an unwanted trip to the ER.



For decades, Thanksgiving has been a time when families gather together at the beginning of a busy holiday season.

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As an emergency physician, I have seen the unique types of injuries that can come from these gatherings. (It might not surprise you to know that most injuries from Thanksgiving are kitchen-related.)

Here are some of the most common injuries I have seen and how you can avoid them:

Cuts and lacerations. Because the production of a large holiday meal often calls for the all-hands-on-deck approach, it often brings novices into the kitchen. It

should be no surprise, then, that emergency departments often treat cuts and lacerations from people using knives and other sharp implements to help prepare a holiday meal. Take a moment to ensure that anyone offering to assist in the kitchen is familiar with the safe use of the tools they are going to be using.

Burns. Burns of the hands and arms are another common holiday occurrence. Novices may attempt to navigate oversized broiler pans into ovens, or large portions may boil over their containers. Be sure to use protective oven mitts that comfortably cover and protect all sides of the hand when reaching into the oven. Avoid wearing loose clothing that could get caught while moving hot foods, causing a spill or even causing you to catch on fire if it comes in contact with a burner.

Food poisoning. Improperly preparing food, or storing and transporting it at the wrong temperature, allows bacteria to thrive. The resulting cases of foodborne illness can cause people to seek out emergency treatment. While these cases of “food poisoning” are often mild and not life-threatening, they can certainly put a damper on holiday celebrations. To ensure foods are properly prepared and stored, check the U.S. Food and Drug Administration website for safe food preparation tips.

Falls. The Thanksgiving weekend commonly marks the beginning of a busier holiday season, and is often used for more than just shopping. Over the years I've encountered a number of patients injured when they fell off roofs, ladders or trees while attempting to place lights and other decorations. Have a spotter when using a ladder, and know your limits.

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Sports injuries. Friendly competition and family events often go hand-in-hand. But each pick-up football game and driveway basketball showdown brings a risk of ankle sprains, facial lacerations from a stray elbow, and even broken bones and concussions. Use proper equipment, and be sure you have a space clear of obstructions that could cause trips and falls. With simple planning, you can ensure your backyard sporting event doesn't turn into a trip to the emergency department.

Alcohol. Alcohol is often a part of holiday celebrations. Avoid drinking and driving, as each drink impacts your ability to safely operate a vehicle. Designate a driver, and get home safely. Also, bear in mind that alcohol makes almost all of the above activities even riskier.

Plan ahead for the holiday

Thanksgiving is a good time to check your medical information, as it's the beginning of a popular travel season.

Enter your medical information into an app on your phone, or write your medical problems, allergies and medications on a wallet card. That way, if you find yourself in a hospital far from home this holiday season, you can help the emergency department personnel provide good and timely care for you and your family.

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