

RISK CONTROL CONSULTING

Preparing Foods with Knives



Knives are always hazardous. Whether they are sharp or dull and whether they are in use or being stored. Other hazards involve leaving knives on counter and working in extreme or awkward positions.

Hazard: Dull or Sharp Knife Blade

Details

- Dull knives require extra pressure to work effectively. Using force to cut with a dull knife can cause you to lose control, sending the knife in an unpredictable direction

Threat

- Injuries to tendons and muscles
- Minor or serious cuts
- Possible amputation of fingers

Before You Start

- Wash and sanitize your own knife after use, or place knives in a labeled container at the dish area
- Keep the knife at the back of the counter, with the sharp edge facing away from you, when it is not in use

- Keep knives sharpened to reduce the pressure needed to work effectively
- When you sharpen a knife, swing it away from your body and hands
- To prevent the board from sliding on the counter, use a proper cutting board and slip-resistant matting (or a damp towel)
- When required by your workplace procedures, put on a personal protective equipment (PPE) such as mesh or Kevlar gloves and an apron

While You are Working

- When you are trimming or boning, cut away from your body and fingers – if you slip slightly, the blade will not keep coming towards you and cause injury
- Put anything that you are cutting on a cutting board instead of holding it in your hand (“palming” it)
- Carry only one knife at a time, with the blade pointed down and close to your side

When you Have Finished Using the Knife

- After using the knife, wash, sanitize and dry it separately (preferably by hand) – this keeps the knife from rusting and getting dull *f*. Store knives in a knife rack or a drawer, with the handle facing the front
- If you cannot wash, sanitize and dry the knife right away, place it in a labeled container at the dish area
- Do not leave knives with other utensils to soak in a container or bus tub

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At all Times

- Pay attention to where the knife's edge is pointing
- Carry only one knife at a time, with the blade close to your side and pointed down
- Use the right cutting tool for each task
- **Do not** fool around when you are handling knives
- **Do not** talk while you are using a knife – concentrate on your cutting and practice knife habits
- **Do not** try to catch a falling knife – stand back and let it fall

Hazard: Knives on Counters

Details

- Workers who do not know that knives are left on counters may be cut

Threat

- Cuts

Safe Work Guidelines

- Store knives in a knife holder or a knife rack with the handles facing the front, so that:
 - You can easily grasp the handle of the knife you want to use, and
 - The blades of the knives stay sharp
- Do not store knives in a drawer:
 - The knife blades can be damaged from banging around, and
 - Someone reaching into the drawer for a knife may be severely cut

Hazard: Working in Awkward Positions

Details

- Muscles tire quickly when you work in an extreme or awkward position which places them at higher risk for injury

Threat

- Injuries to muscles, tendons and joints

Safe Work Guidelines

- Rotate your work activities to break up repetitive or awkward tasks, such as cutting vegetables
- Keep you back and neck straight
- Adjust counter height so that:
 - your work surfaces are at waist height
 - you can keep your upper arms relaxed,
 - you can keep your forearms and wrists straight
- You can stack two cutting boards together with a damp cloth between them if the cutting surface is too low
- To improve blood circulation and reduce muscle tension, take regular mini-breaks to stretch or move
- Whenever possible, use mechanical slicers instead of cutting food by hand
- Whenever possible, keep fit; stretch and exercise your body regularly outside of work
- If you stand for a long time, use anti-fatigue mats or put one foot on a foot rest

This Tribal First Risk Control Consulting fact sheet is not intended to be exhaustive. The discussion and best practices suggested herein should not be regarded as legal advice. Readers should pursue legal counsel or contact their insurance providers to gain more exhaustive advice. For more information on this topic, please contact Tribal First Risk Control Consulting at (888) 737-4752 or riskcontrol@tribalfirst.com.