

# HOLIDAY HAND SAFETY

'Tis the season for hand injuries from holiday activities. **Dr. Keith A. Segalman**, a surgeon with **Greater Chesapeake Hand Specialists, P.A.** in Lutherville, explains common types of injuries, prevention techniques and treatment options.

## **1. OVERUSE**

Excessive gripping of cooking utensils, using scissors for gift wrapping, and lifting trees and heavy presents can lead to carpal tunnel, tendonitis or aggravation of arthritis. To prevent this:

- Pace yourself.
- Stretch, take breaks and alternate activities.
- If you use a brace, continue to use it while performing these activities.
- If you normally take an anti-inflammatory, be sure to take it before performing these activities.
- Stop if you have pain.

## **2. LACERATIONS**

It's easy to cut yourself while wrapping gifts, chopping and carving the holiday meal or washing dishes afterward. To minimize this, follow these steps:

### **Cutting**

- Leave carving to the adults. Children have not yet developed the dexterity skills necessary to safely handle sharp utensils.
- Never cut towards yourself. Place your free hand opposite the side you are carving towards.
- Don't place your hand underneath the blade to catch the slice of meat.
- Keep your cutting area well-lit and dry.
- Keep your knife handles dry to prevent your hand from slipping down onto the blade and causing a nasty cut.
- Keep all cutting utensils sharp. A sharp knife will never need to be forced to cut, chop, carve or slice. A knife too dull to cut properly is still sharp enough to cause an injury.
- Use kitchen shears to tackle the job of cutting bones and joints.

### **Handling Dishes or Glassware**

- Wear rubber gloves for protection against cuts and dry skin.
- If a glass or dish breaks, handle carefully.
- Use a broom, not your hand to sweep it.

If you do cut yourself, bleeding from minor cuts will often stop on their own by applying direct pressure to the wound with a clean cloth.

### **Visit an emergency room or a hand surgeon if:**

- Continuous pressure does not stop the bleeding after 15 minutes
- You notice persistent numbness or tingling in the fingertip
- You are unsure of your tetanus immunization status
- You are unable to thoroughly cleanse the wound by rinsing with a mild soap and plenty of clean water

### **3. BURNS**

To prevent burns from cooking, tending your fireplace or lighting holiday candles:

- Avoid putting your hand close to hot object.
- Use lighters, not matches to illumine candles.
- Wear oven mitts when handling hot pots.
- Don't handle hot oil.
- Place a screen over a pot with fried or hot oil to prevent splattering.
- When frying with grease, use a utensil with long handle to prevent splattering.
- Use fireplace tools to turn logs.
- Ideally, have a screen in front of the fireplace.

#### **If you do burn yourself:**

- Cool it as quickly as possible with cold water or ice.
- Never put butter or oil on it because that will keep in the heat.
- If you blister, it's a sign of a severe burn. Don't pop it. Put antibiotic cream on top and seek medical attention.

### **4. ELECTRICAL**

To prevent electrocution when lighting your Christmas tree:

- Wear gloves when lifting the tree to prevent splinters.
- Make sure there are no breaks in the cord, broken bulbs.
- Plug in lights before putting them on the tree to ensure they work.

**IF YOU GET KNOCKED TO THE GROUND OR BURN YOUR SKIN FROM AN ELECTRICAL CURRENT, GO TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM, STAT!!**