6 Common Kitchen Injuries and How to Prevent and Treat Them

Kitchen injuries are no joke, so we caught up with ER professionals to find out what they are and how to treat them.

As much as we hate to admit it, the kitchen can be a dangerous place. Hot surfaces, sharp objects, and slippery floors are all lurking in the shadows as you prepare a delicious and amazing meal. Each year, hundreds of people with a bloody hand and an empty stomach come through an emergency room’s door because of kitchen-related injuries, and many of them can be life-threatening if the proper steps are not taken. No matter how careful you may think you are in the kitchen, there’s always a risk of injury, so we caught up with a couple of medical professionals to learn about the most common ones and what you should know about them.
If you ask SUNY Downstate Medical Center’s ER Dr. Michael Lanigan about what he sees in the field in regards to kitchen injuries, he’ll tell you two things: burns and cuts. Nearly 95 percent of the kitchen-related injuries he treats fall under those two categories, and it’s not surprising, what with all of the chopping, cutting, frying, and baking going on. In Lanigan’s opinion, these two injuries should never be taken lightly, so we’ll go over what you need to know about them and what the next steps are if you fall victim to one of them. The Culinary Institute of America’s RN Kelly O’Connor is constantly on the look out for burns when treating students, both contact and liquid, because each have varying degrees of severity and surface-area impact. We’ll go into detail about contact and liquid burns and how to prevent them.

Beyond cuts and burns, there’s a few other injuries that can happen in the kitchen that can be prevented as long as you’re aware of them, says Dr. Geoffrey Renk of Charleston’s Roper St. Francis Healthcare. Awareness is key when working in the kitchen, and along with that, he suggests taking cooking classes to learn best safety practices, and to learn how to use a knife before even thinking about using one. We want you to be safe in the kitchen and prevent yourself from harm when cooking, so read about what you should be on the lookout for.
**Burn - Liquid**

**What it Is:** You can burn more than just your food in the kitchen, and one of the most common kitchen injuries is damage to the skin from hot liquids such as hot water, grease, or others substances.

**How to Prevent It:** Caution is the best practice for avoiding burns. Always be aware if a hot substance is around, and keep the flame at a reasonable level to avoid splatter burns when frying food.

**How to Treat It:** Whenever you burn yourself, run your injury under cold water for as long as possible. The cold water cools the skin and stops the burning from causing more damage to the skin tissues. Harder burns to treat are grease burns, because they can be hotter than water, and other liquids such as caramelized sugar, because they stick to your skin and are harder to remove. Dr. Renk says that if there's no open blisters or wounds, you can probably avoid a doctor's visit, but make sure to treat it with ice and Neosporin. Remember to keep the wound clean and to change your dressings regularly in order to avoid infection.
Bumping Your Head

What It Is: With cooks constantly on the move in the kitchen, it’s easy to leave a cabinet or drawer open here or there, which can lead to blunt force trauma to the head.

How to Prevent It: Slow down. Everything will get done and out on the table on time, so take the time to put things away and close the cabinets when you’re done with them.

How to Treat It: If you become unconscious from hitting your head, have someone take you to the emergency room right away, otherwise, a good old ice pack to the head will do the trick.

Knife Cut

What it is: Civilians and kitchen workers are constantly coming through the ER with knife cuts or deep lacerations to their fingers and palms, say Dr. Lanigan.

How to Prevent It: Always hold your knife with a firm grip to prevent it from falling out of your hands and keep the tips of your fingers curled while holding something in place to be cut.

How to Treat It: As soon as you cut yourself, wash the wound immediately — no matter how painful — in order to prevent infection to one of your body’s most important assets. Dry and clean the dressing and hold pressure directly to the wound. Do not elevate or use a tourniquet unless the bleeding is very bad, in which case you should go to the emergency room immediately. Dr. Lanigan stresses that you should see a doctor regardless whenever you cut yourself, and if you think you will need stitches, to visit one within the first 12 hours of cutting yourself.

The two most important things to consider with knife cuts are depth and what part of the hand was injured. Dr. Renk explains that because the hand is such a complex structure, its important to be aware of where you’ve cut yourself and how deep
because you may have punctured a tendon or an important muscle. Cuts on the tips of fingers and tops of knuckles will not cause too much serious damage, whereas anything to the palm or finger could be detrimental to your hand movement and have long term effects.

**Burn - Contact**

**What It Is:** We've all fallen for it: touched the cookie sheet despite knowing it just sat in the oven for 20 minutes. Another type of contact burn is from the flame itself, which happens frequently when flambéing or cooking with alcohol. While causing the same type of injury to the skin, contact burns are more severe than liquid burns because the heat is more direct, causing a more painful and serious burn.

**How to Prevent It:** Always be aware of hot surfaces while working in the kitchen, and use kitchen mitts as much as possible. Keep the handles of your pots on the stove-top facing in order to avoid knocking them over.

**Tripping**

**What It Is:** As silly as it sounds, tripping in the kitchen can lead to some pretty serious consequences, some of which are other injuries discussed here.

**How to Prevent It:** Dr. Lanigan stresses that he never lets his kids in the kitchen while working, as they tend to linger around the cook who often forgets they're there, and while the pooch may serve as a great sous chef in the form of clean up, best that they stay out of the kitchen as well.

**How to Treat It:** Tripping usually leads to minor injuries that can be treated with an ice pack or a couple of aspirin, but if it leads to one of the 6 common injuries here, see that slide for treatment.
Eye Irritation

**What It Is:** Believe it or not, but eyes are at risk when working in the kitchen, especially when working with ingredients such as chile peppers or spicy ingredients. When substances with heat get into the eye, it can cause irritation and sometimes even infection.

**How to Prevent It:** Always be conscious of the food you’re working with when you’re in the kitchen, and never rub your eyes if you’re handling hot spices or pepper seeds. When frying food, be sure to keep your face as far away from the hot grease as possible, to avoid getting grease splatter in your eyes.

**How to Treat It:** If there is irritation caused to your eyes, flush them out immediately with water and have someone take you to the emergency room as soon as possible, where you can be treated for possible infection.