

Safe Cooking for the Holidays: Keeping Your Family Safe in the Kitchen This Season

The holidays bring families together, and often, they bring everyone into the kitchen. Between the bustle of preparing meals, greeting guests, and keeping traditions alive, safety can sometimes take a back seat. Unfortunately, this is also one of the most common times of year for kitchen-related injuries and fires.

The American Trauma Society, Pennsylvania Division (ATSPA) encourages everyone to take a few extra precautions to make sure your celebrations stay safe, healthy, and happy.

Turkey Fryer Safety

Frying a turkey may deliver delicious results, but it's also one of the most dangerous holiday cooking methods if not done correctly.

To reduce your risk of burns and fires:

- **Outside:** Always fry outdoors, on a flat surface, well away from your home, garage, and trees.
- **Thawed:** Thaw the turkey completely and pat it dry before frying, even a small amount of ice or water can cause oil to splatter or boil over.
- **Filled Correctly:** Never overfill the fryer with oil.
- **Extinguisher:** Keep a fire extinguisher nearby and never use water to extinguish an oil fire.
- **Watch:** Never leave the fryer unattended, even for a moment.

If you're unsure about using a fryer safely, consider oven-roasting or ordering a pre-cooked bird from a local grocer instead.

Preventing Burns and Kitchen Fires

The U.S. Fire Administration reports that cooking is the leading cause of home fires and fire injuries, and Thanksgiving Day is the peak.

Keep your kitchen safe by:

- **Staying in the kitchen** while cooking, especially when frying, grilling, or broiling.
- **Keeping flammable items** (towels, oven mitts, paper, or packaging) away from stovetops.

- **Turning pot handles inward** to prevent spills and burns.
- **Wearing short or tight-fitting sleeves** while cooking to avoid catching clothing on fire.
- **Setting a timer** to remind you when food is done, especially when multitasking.

If a small grease fire starts, **turn off the heat and cover the pan with a lid**. Do not use water. For larger fires, evacuate immediately and call 911.

Food Safety: Don't Let Holiday Meals Make You Sick

Foodborne illnesses can put a damper on any celebration. When in doubt, remember the rule: *“When in doubt, throw it out.”*

Follow these key steps to keep your holiday meals safe to eat:

- **Clean:** Wash your hands, utensils, and surfaces often.
- **Separate:** Keep raw meat, poultry, and seafood away from ready-to-eat foods.
- **Cook:** Use a food thermometer to ensure meat is cooked to safe internal temperatures. Turkey should reach **165°F** in the thickest part of the bird.
- **Chill:** Refrigerate leftovers within **two hours** to prevent bacterial growth.

Holiday kitchens are busy places, and full of hazards for little ones.

- **Create a “kid-free zone”** of at least three feet around hot stoves and ovens.
- **Keep hot food and liquids away from the edges** of counters and tables.
- **Store knives, matches, and lighters out of reach.**
- **Teach children** about safe kitchen behaviors, like using oven mitts, washing hands, and waiting for help before handling hot food.
- **Give kids age-appropriate tasks** like stirring cool ingredients or setting the table.

Cooking together can be a fun and educational activity when done safely.

With a little planning and mindfulness, your holiday gatherings can be full of joy, not trips to the emergency department. The team at ATSPA wishes you and your loved ones a safe, warm, and injury-free Thanksgiving.