KITCHEN KNIFE SAFETY

INTRODUCTION

Whether you are in a restaurant kitchen, school kitchen, butcher shop, or other food prep business, knives are commonly used to slice, dice, julienne, brunoise, chop, and otherwise cut fruits, vegetables, herbs, and meats. When improperly used, knives could expose you to harm because of the sharp edge of the blade. In this lesson, we will cover the different types of kitchen knives that you may find in your work environment, the hazards, and the safe work practices associated with these kitchen tools.

TYPES OF KITCHEN KNIVES

There are many different types of kitchen knives that may be used in a restaurant or other food prep environment. These include, but may not be limited to:

- Chef knife
- Paring knife
- Boning knife
- Serrated knife
- Nakiri/vegetable knife
- Slicing knife
- Craving knife

HAZARDS

When using a knife, you could be exposed to one or more of the following hazards:

- Cuts or lacerations from the blade making contact with your fingers or hand
- Amputation of fingers if the blade chops off the extremities
- Stabbing someone or yourself with the blade of the knife when improperly carrying the knife

SAFE WORK PRACTICES

Before Using a Knife

Before using a kitchen knife, you should do the following:

- Inspect the knife for damage.
  - Report damaged knives to your supervisor.
  - Do NOT use a damaged knife.
- Check the knife for sharpness.
  - Using a honing steel as needed to bring the edge of your knife back.
  - Only allow trained and authorized personnel or third-party vendors to sharpen knives.
    - Sharpen knives as needed using either a whetstone, electrical sharpener, or manual sharpener.

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        - Where applicable, use all sharpening equipment in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.
    - Do NOT use a dull knife.
        - Please note that cuts made by dull knives usually result in jagged injuries, which can make it more difficult for medical personnel to stitch up, while cuts made by sharp knives usually result in a clean cut, which is easier to stitch up if stitches are needed. Additionally, using a dull knife will usually require more pressure than with a sharp knife. This additional pressure can increase the chances of an accident occurring.

When Using a Knife

Note: Depending on your facility, you may be required to wear cut-resistant gloves while using a kitchen knife. If you have questions regarding cut-resistant gloves at your facility, please speak with your supervisor.

When using a knife, you should do the following:

- Only allow trained and authorized employees to use kitchen knives.
- Only use kitchen knives for cutting food.
- Make sure that your hands are clean and dry when handling and using knives.
- Assure that the blade of the knife is facing down when you are moving around the kitchen with the knife.
    - Alert others who may be working in the area that you are walking with a knife.
    - Do NOT point or throw knives at others.
    - If you need to pass the knife to someone, either lay the knife down on the work service and allow them to pick it up or pass the handle to the person.
    - Do NOT run while holding a knife.
    - Be alert to the placement of the facing down blade, as you could accidentally stab yourself in the calf while walking with the blade if it is not in a sheath, scabbard, or other blade protector.
- Make sure to use a cutting board that is appropriate for both the knife and the food you will be working with.
    - Many in the cooking/food prep industry recommend wood, bamboo, rubber, and/or plastic cutting boards, as using a knife on a glass, ceramic, and/or granite cutting board may damage the knife.
    - If you have questions about which cutting boards to use in your establishment, please speak with your supervisor.
- Assure that your cutting board has been properly secured against accidental movement.
    - Depending on the establishment, this may be achieved by either using a wet paper towel or cloth underneath the board or a non-slip mat.
- Make sure that you are using the appropriate knife for the food and cut you are wanting to make.
- Keep your fingertips curled under the hand that is holding the food.
    - In the cooking/food prep industry, this is sometimes referred to as the "claw."
- Make sure that you have a firm grip on the knife.
    - If you have questions regarding gripping techniques on the knives at your facility, please speak with your supervisor.
    - Do NOT try to catch a falling knife, as this could result in an injury to your hand.
- Where feasible, make cuts away from your body to minimize your chances of injuring yourself.
- Do NOT rush your cut, as rushing could result in an injury.
- Pay attention to the cut that you are making, as a simple lapse in attention could result in an injury.
    - If you need to speak with someone or otherwise get distracted, make sure to put the knife down on the board so it is flat, and then proceed with your current task.
    - Assure that the blade is placed with the blade facing away from you.

  - Do NOT use a knife while distracted.
- Make sure to clean knives in accordance with your company's policies and procedures when you are finished.

Knife Storage

When you are finished with your knife, and it has been properly cleaned, it should be stored properly. Typically, knives will be stored in one or more of the following ways:

- Knife blocks
- Knife rack
- Knife bag/case/roll
  - Knives in these cases should have a knife guard or sheath.
- Knife cabinet
- Magnetic strip
- In drawer knife block
- Knife sheath

Do NOT place knives in drawers without a knife block or appropriate sheath, as placing kitchen knives in drawers without proper protection could result in damage to the knife or someone who is blindly reaching in getting injured.

If you have questions regarding how to store knives at your facility, please speak with your supervisor.

WHAT TO DO IF SOMEONE GETS CUT BY THE KNIFE

Note: For more information on first aid for cuts and lacerations, please refer to our "First Aid: Cuts, Lacerations, and Punctures" lesson. Additionally, if you do not feel comfortable providing first aid, you should look and send someone to search for someone who is.

Minor Wounds

When working with knives, there is always the possibility that you will get a cut. If you or someone else gets cut while handling a kitchen knife, you should do the following for minor wounds:

- Remain calm.
- Make sure to wash the wound with soap and water.
  - If available, use antibacterial ointment after washing with soap and water.
- Make sure that the wound is covered with an appropriately sized band-aid or other type of dressing.
  - Changing the dressing as needed or if it becomes wet or dirty.
- Report the injury to your supervisor.
- Monitor the wound for signs of infection.
  - If the wound starts to show signs of infection, seek immediate medical assistance.

Major Wounds

Major cuts should be treated by a licensed medical professional, as stitching of the wound may be required. Seek immediate medical attention for large and/or deep cuts. Report wounds that require professional medical treatment to your supervisor.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, many restaurants and food prep companies use kitchen knives to prepare food. And why these culinary tools are commonly used, improper use or storage of these tools could expose you or others to harm. To help minimize the chances of an accident occurring, knives should be handled and stored in accordance with your company's policies and procedures. Additionally, you should only use sharp knives, as the cuts produced by dull knives can be more dangerous than those created by a sharp blade. If you have questions regarding the handling and storing of kitchen knives at your facility, please speak with your supervisor.