

Don't add an ER visit to your holiday plans

November 18 2009, by Margot Carmichael Lester

(PhysOrg.com) -- UNC emergency physician Abhi Mehrotra, M.D., explains how you can avoid the most common injuries that land people in a hospital emergency department during the four-day Thanksgiving holiday period.

Visiting is a big part of the [Thanksgiving holiday](#). But one place you don't want to stop by is the [Emergency Department](#).

“Most people who come in over that four-day period are here for fever, back pain, abdominal pain and chest pain,” explains Abhi Mehrotra, M.D., assistant medical director in the Department of Emergency Medicine at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Medicine. “That’s not unexpected because those are the most common complaints anyway.”

But there are those of us who need medical attention for lacerations, burns and other injuries that stem directly from holiday-related activities.

Lacerations

At Thanksgiving, it's not unusual to have too many cooks in the kitchen. Needless to say, keep knives and other sharp objects out of reach of children - and anyone else who's likely to be a little too cavalier about carving.

“Pay attention to what you're doing and be vigilant about where things

are - that's best way to avoid injury," Mehrotra says. "Make sure you're familiar with the equipment before you start using it. And don't rush."

Burns

Many of us like to try something new for the big meal. Deep-fried turkey is a popular - and potentially dangerous - way to prepare the bird. Just remember that you want people oohing and ahing over the finished product, not the preparatory pyrotechnics.

"The bird should be fresh or thawed - not frozen - and be careful to raise and lower it slowly to avoid splashing the hot grease," Mehrotra explains. "It's also important to make sure you don't have any skin exposed. Wear a long-sleeved shirt and gloves for protection. Finally, have a working fire extinguisher nearby at all times."

Dietary Issues

Thanksgiving is the biggest eating day of the year, and even the most vigilant of us can easily overindulge.

"The data shows large meals are less healthy than smaller meals more frequently," Mehrotra says. "So if you want to have the same amount of turkey, spread it out over several hours. You'll feel better for it." You can still take a nap during the third quarter of the football game, though.

And don't forget that dietary restrictions still apply even on holidays. If you're on a special diet for health reasons, do your best to stick to it. If you just can't resist Aunt Beulah's super-sweet pumpkin pie cheesecake or Uncle Zeb's salty country ham, take a tiny portion to savor.

Overexertion

Shopping on Thanksgiving weekend is like a full-contact marathon. Between the rock-bottom, door-buster deals offered on Black Friday and Cyber Monday, it's possible to damage more than your bank balance.

If you're hitting the stores, avoid overexerting yourself. Even if you're going with Cousin Sue, the super-shopper, remember that "shop till ya drop" is just an expression, not a command. "It's important to pace yourself," Mehrotra says. This is especially wise if you're unaccustomed to being on your feet for long periods, or if you don't get much regular exercise. "Plan breaks where you can sit down and rest a little. And make sure you keep hydrated throughout the day." Think of all the great people-watching you can do during that break.

You're not out of the woods just because you do your shopping on Cyber Monday. If you're not careful, you could find muscle pain, stiffness and eye strain in your online shopping cart. "You want to have adequate lighting and your computer and chair positioned well for back, eyes and arms," Mehrotra notes. Step away from the computer periodically to give your upper body a break.

"Moderation, prevention and good old common sense are the best ways to avoid an emergency room visit," Mehrotra says. "But if you're not feeling well, come in. The nurses, physicians, and staff of the Emergency Department are here to care for you 24/7, including the holidays."

Provided by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Medicine

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