It’s your turn to host the holiday dinner. The family is gathered for the ceremonial carving of the turkey, and you remember the way you massacred the turkey last year. It wasn’t exactly a Norman Rockwell moment with perfectly carved slices — more like a cheap slasher movie.

Maybe you need better knives to help you get better results. Knives are a kitchen essential, but most of us buy a set, mistreat them by throwing them in a drawer and then still expect them to perform like a precision instrument.

A lack of care is a major problem with knives. They can only work as well as they are treated.

The first step is to make sure that the knife is sharp. Did you know that more than 350,000 people were treated for lacerations of all kinds (not just kitchen knives) in 2012? Dull knives are more dangerous than sharp ones because you have to apply more pressure for a dull knife to do its job. More pressure means a greater chance for slipping and cuts. So sharpen whatever knife you are using on a regular basis.

Each time before you use a knife, use sharpening steel. The name is a little misleading. As knives are used, the thin edge of the knife bends. The steel simply straightens the edge of the knife so it will cut easily, but it doesn’t sharpen the blade.

If you are one of the people who tend to leave knives in the sink or put them in the dishwasher, you can’t expect the knife to continue to cut at a top level. Both of these practices tends to lead to corrosion, which will eventually destroy the knife and will decrease the cutting ability in the short run. If you want knives to last as long as possible and perform their best, you will want to wash them promptly after use and dry them before putting them up. To keep blades sharp and keep from cutting yourself, store knives
in a knife block or on a wall rack. Loose in a drawer is the best way to cut yourself rather than food.

So if you are in the market to buy a new knife for that Thanksgiving turkey, there are a few things to consider. Knives are either stamped or forged. Stamped knives are pressed from a solid piece of metal on a cookie cutter-type machine. They are the same thickness throughout other than the edge. The more expensive option is the forged blade, which is poured from molten metal and hammered into shape. The forged knife has a less flexible blade, which factors into your carving techniques. You can find good knives that are either stamped or forged.

In choosing a knife for carving, you’ll want a slicer, one that is longer and thinner. Pick up the knife and see how it feels in your hand. It should feel balanced and should be easy to grip. Look at how much metal there is in the knife. If you want the knife to last, it must have enough metal. Check the knife handle and hilt. It must be well joined, solid and easy to clean. If there is a gap between the handle and the knife, there is a chance to let in moisture, which will destroy the handle. It’s also a good place for bacteria to grow and thrive.

Good knives are an investment that can last 20 to 30 years. Make sure you choose carefully and take good care of the ones you do buy.

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