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PREVENTING ACCIDENTS WHILE SLICING FOOD

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Introduction

A HACCP program requires the prevention, elimination, or reduction to a safe level of physical hazards in food.

Recently, there have been reports of actual fingertips in salads and other foods – a physical hazard. At least one incident, at Wendy's, was a fraud, but other incidents involving salads earlier this year were legitimate. This is a very old problem associated with the incorrect use of a knife to cut food. The following describes the professional cook's approach to solving the problem.

Corrective action

There are two steps to the corrective action for avoiding this physical "hazard / incident." First, if there is an incident, there will be a lot of excitement in the kitchen, with people trying to aid the injured employee. One cannot forget, however, that any food that was being prepared by the employee at the time of the incident must be thrown out. There will probably be some blood from the employee in the food as well as a piece of skin. While there is no significant illness hazard because of the blood and skin, there is the regulatory adulteration issue, and the food cannot be saved. After the employee injury has been handled, the food must be thrown out immediately.

The second part of corrective action is to prevent it from happening again. It depends on how a cook holds the food. A novice cook tends to hold food to be cut with the thumb on one side of the food, such as a tomato, and the other fingers on the other side, and put the knife between the thumb and fingers to slice (Fig. 1). This leads to cut-off pieces of finger. The professional way to hold food is to cup the hand and fingers and run the knife blade next to the knuckles down into the food (Fig. 2).

Summary

Managers should review this with all of their cooks in order to avoid accidents. If the fingers are cupped, there is little risk of cutting the fingers.

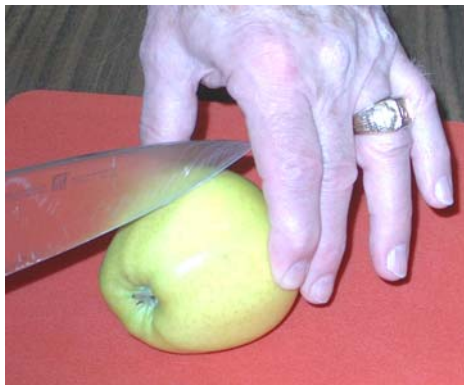


Fig. 1. Hazardous way



Fig. 2. Safe way