Thanksgiving is a time for family, friends, good food and good times. The nation's emergency physicians want it to stay that way and not become a memory that involves a visit to the nearest ER.

"We are prepared to treat you at any moment should you need it," said Andrew Sama, MD, FACEP, president of the American College of Emergency Physicians. "But we hope that by following some common sense precautions, you can avoid spending time with us and instead spend more time enjoying time with loved ones."

Food Preparation Safety

The risk of bacterial contamination can be high with any raw meat. Wash hands thoroughly when handling uncooked meat and keep it separate from other foods.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the oven temperature should be no lower than 325 degrees and the turkey should be completely thawed before cooking.

A food thermometer must register a safe minimum temperature of 165 degrees inside the turkey.

It's best to cook stuffing outside the turkey in a casserole, but if choosing to stuff a turkey, make sure the stuffing also reaches a temperature of 165 degrees (CDC) to ensure there is no bacterial contamination. Refrigerate all leftovers.

Individuals with food allergies who have not prepared their own meals at home should ask about food preparation and ingredients to prevent unnecessary exposure and an allergic reaction.

One of the more common injuries that emergency physicians treat during the Thanksgiving holiday involves knives –specifically carving knives that can cut fingers and hands.

Be careful when slicing food, and more specifically, do not rush. More accidents occur when carving and cutting too quickly. Allow someone experienced in handling sharp knives to do the carving.

Burns are another common injury during Thanksgiving. The kitchen can be a dangerous place, especially around the oven and grill. Again, don't rush when cooking dinner. Leave plenty of time to get it done.

A special note of caution needs to be made for anyone who decides to deep fry a turkey. This can be very dangerous and cause serious burns and fires, especially if having never attempted this before. Make sure to research the proper way to "deep fry" carefully and use extreme caution if deciding to deep fry a turkey.

Eating Safely

The key is to approach Thanksgiving meal with moderation. Food is usually abundant on Thanksgiving, however for some, it can be too much, consumed too quickly.

For those with medical conditions like congestive heart failure, kidney disease, high blood pressure, etc., excess of salt can be dangerous. Monitor sodium intake and make sure to take any necessary prescription medications, as taken any other day. Consult a doctor if necessary.

Eat food slowly and when satisfied take a break and allow the body to process it. Eating too quickly can cause heartburn, indigestion and may create chest pain, which generally requires assessment.

Injury Prevention

Before or after the meal, it's common for many to head outside and play sports (football,

basketball, etc.). Many injuries occur in those not used to routine exercise. For those who must play in a traditional “Thanksgiving game,” have fun and go easy and don’t overdoing it.
Emergency physicians warn that it’s important to pace one’s self after a big meal and for those who are not used to regular physical activity are recommended to reconsidering. Doctors see many sprains, strains and fractures in those who try to do too much, too quickly. We also treat patients who develop shortness of breath and chest pain from overextension.