

# Knife Skills for the Beginning Chef

## Knife Safety:

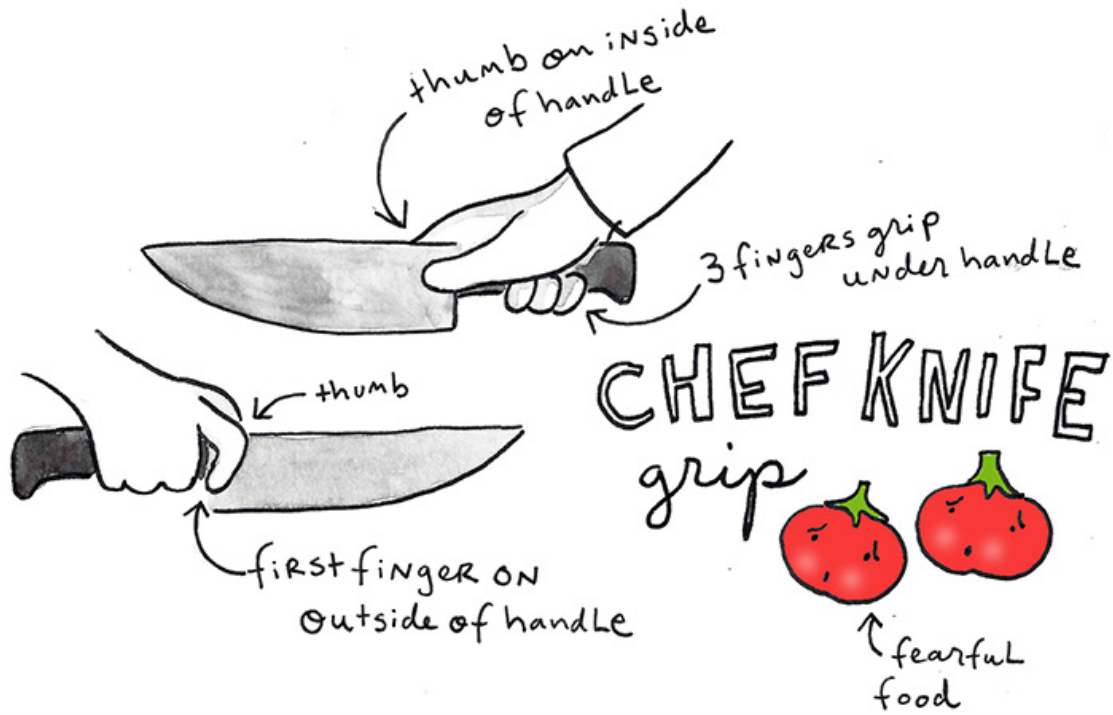
- Whenever you are cutting food, be sure to use a very sharp knife on a sturdy surface.
- If you are cutting on a cutting board, place a damp cloth under it to prevent the board from slipping.
- Tuck your fingertips under your knuckles and rest the blade of the knife against your knuckles.
- Use your fingertips to guide the knife along whatever you are cutting.

## How to Hold a Knife:

Have you ever learned the proper way to hold a knife?

Learning proper knife skills helps ensure safety in the kitchen, keeping food, not fingers, on the chopping block. Also, proper knife handling can ensure precision and consistency in food cuts, which can result in more even cooking and more professional results.

This illustrated guide will teach you the proper way to hold a knife, improper ways to hold a knife, and address the hows and whys of both.



# HOW TO HOLD A KNIFE

What about the  
**OTHER HAND?**



## The Proper Chef's Knife Grip

The proper, go-to chef's knife grip goes a little like this:

The hand that is holding the knife is not simply clutching it within a fist. The thumb rests on the inside of the knife, safely above the sharpened blade. The forefinger is slightly bent, and gently “hooks” the outside of the knife, right around where the blade meets the handle, but once again, at a safe distance from the sharp blade. The positioning of the thumb and forefinger allows the chef to properly direct and guide the blade, so that it the knife can be used to cut exactly where he or she wants. Of course, this may lead to an important follow-up question...

### *What about the other hand?*

Where is the hand that isn't holding the knife? While it's not as active in knife work, it's no less important: it can be used to help “aim” the knife in the right direction, provide stability, and keep food in place while you cut. These are two of the most common positions for the second hand: In the top left illustration, you see that the fingers of the second hand are perched gently on the top of the knife, at a safe distance from the sharp blade. As the primary hand holding the knife cuts in a rocking motion, the position of the second hand allows control and aim in your cutting. This hand position is fantastic for mincing.

In the bottom right illustration, the second hand is poised like a claw inside of the knife. Imagine a piece of food, such as a tomato, within that claw hand. The second hand keeps the food and the knife stable, so that you can cut controlled portions, and neither the knife nor food will slip out of your grasp.

## Other Knife Grips

While the above graphics portray the classic way to hold a knife, these other grips are important.

**The Handle Grip** This knife grip is pretty straightforward:

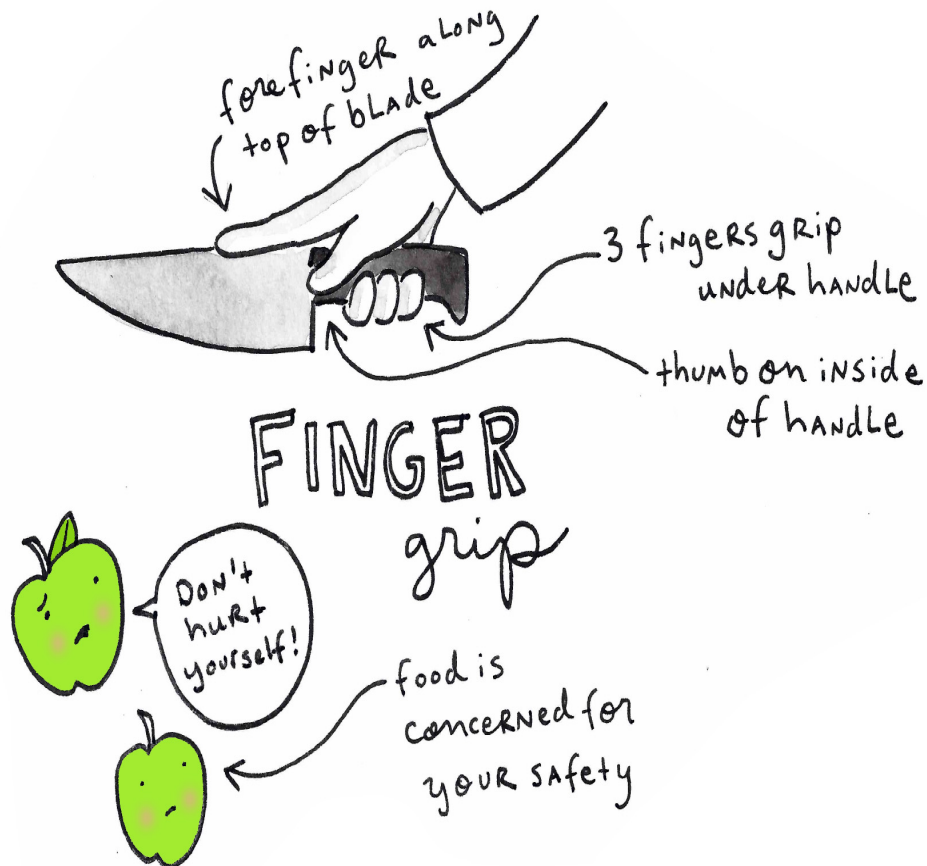


With the handle grip, the dominant hand is curled around the handle of the knife, almost like how you would hold the handle of a jumping rope. This is a common grip for people who have smaller hands, or to chefs who are new to knife work. While it's not a terrible grip, it should primarily be considered a starting point. For many children, they begin to write by clutching pencils and crayons like this, but as they become more practiced and dexterous, they graduate to a grip, which allows them more control. A proper knife grip is kind of like that. Once you've graduated from this handle grip, you can move on to the more refined grip described above.

That having been said, this handle grip is very effective when you are using the knife aligned sideways to smash a fairly soft ingredient, such as a garlic bulb. The non-dominant hand would be used to put pressure on the sideways blade from above, which would result in smashing the item in question.

## The Finger Grip

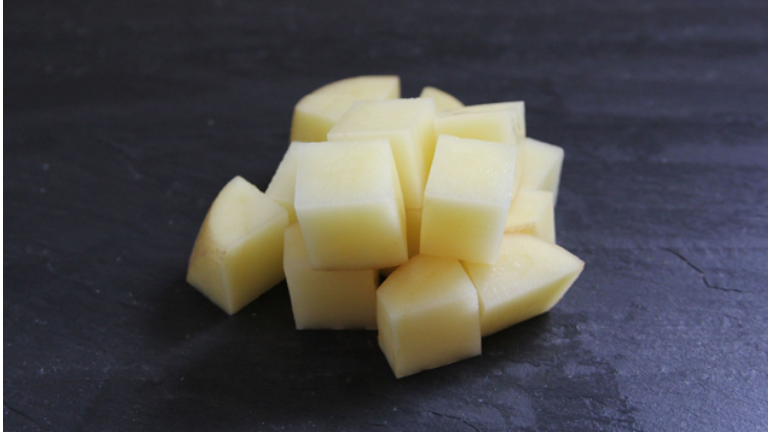
This grip is characterized primarily by the positioning of the forefinger on the knife:



Many believe that the forefinger perched along the line of the knife is a great way to increase precision and aim in their cutting. However, this is not quite the case. There isn't much stability from side to side with this grip, which means that if that top finger slips off of the knife, it could end up right on the cutting block. Ouch! While this might seem like a natural way to hold a knife and might seem easier at first than the proper way to hold a chef's knife, the risk of potential harm is too great to make it an ideal choice for knife handling. While the top method might seem awkward and strange at first, stick with it: the precision and speed will come with time.

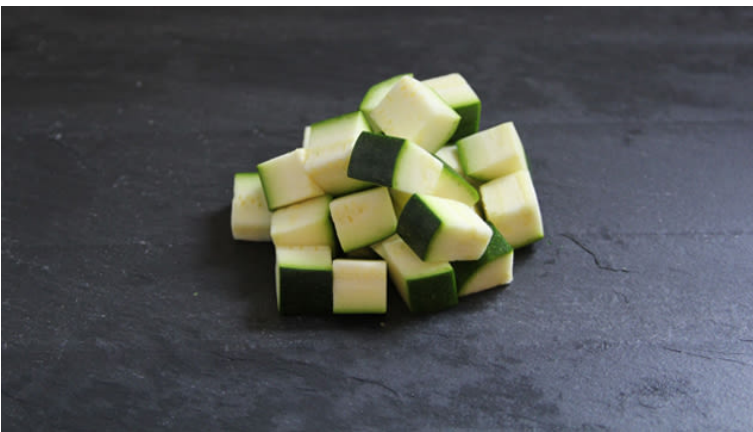
# Basic Culinary Knife Cuts

## Large Dice



A large dice typically refers to a vegetable or item cut into 3/4-inch squares. This is also the cut I use when a recipe calls for something large to be chopped (e.g., chopped potatoes). You might see this cut used for everything from onions to watermelon.

## Medium Dice



A medium dice calls for cutting ingredients into squares with 1/2-inch sides. If a recipe specifies a dice without a modifier (e.g., “diced tomatoes,” without elaborating as to whether they should be small, medium, or large), the medium dice is what I’ll aim for. A lot of recipes call for diced tomatoes, though beets, bell peppers, and cucumbers aren’t uncommon, either.



## Small Dice



A small dice usually refers to an ingredient cut into 1/4-inch cubes. If you see, let's say, "1 cup celery, diced small" in the ingredient list, this is the cut to aim for. A lot of recipes start with a base of sautéed celery, carrots, onions, or bell peppers diced small.

## Julienne



Julienne, is really just a cut of long matchsticks that have a thickness of approximately 1/8 of an inch. You might see a julienne cut atop a recipe like Chinese-style steamed fish or Southeast Asian papaya salad.

## Chiffonade



A chiffonade is similar cut that's applied to vegetable leaves. Simply stack the leaves, roll them tightly, and slice the leaves perpendicular to the roll, creating thin strips. The most frequently chiffonaded vegetable is basil; it's used as a garnish for a number of tomato and basil combinations, from salads to pastas.

## Mince



Smaller than a small dice is a mince. If a small dice is  $\frac{1}{4}$  of an inch, then a mince is approximately closer to  $\frac{1}{16}$ th of an inch. But because it's so fine, it also tends to be less precise. Garlic is the most commonly minced ingredient. Keep in mind that the smaller the knife cut for a pungent ingredient (like garlic, shallot, and onion), the more distributed it will become, and the stronger it will taste.