

Working Safely In Restaurants

The restaurant industry is one of the nation's largest employment sectors, employing approximately 6.5 million workers in the United States each year.¹ This industry also comprises one of the largest groups of workers injured on the job in the US. These injuries and illnesses are costly and damaging, both for the employee and for the individual restaurant owner. Job injuries and illnesses contribute to absenteeism, light duty assignments or other work restrictions, high turnover, and higher workers' compensation costs. Common injuries in restaurants include burns, lacerations, and sprains and strains. Many of these injuries are the result of slipping, tripping, falling, lifting and/or repetitive motions.

Burn Injuries

Work-related burns are a leading cause of occupational injury in the US.² As many as one-third of occupational burns occur in restaurants, totaling about 12,000 reported cases per year, although the actual number is projected to be much higher.

How can burn injuries be prevented?

- 🔥 Avoid overcrowding on the range tops
- 🔥 Set pot handles away from burners, and never stick handles out over the edge of the range
- 🔥 Adjust burner flames to cover only the bottom of a pan
- 🔥 Avoid loose clothing when working around ranges, ovens, or machines
- 🔥 Keep sleeves buttoned
- 🔥 Check hot foods on stove carefully
- 🔥 Place sealed cooking pouches in boiling water carefully to avoid splashing
- 🔥 Do not leave hot oil or grease unattended



🔥 Ask for help when moving or carrying a heavy pot of hot liquid

🔥 Use hot pads when removing items from the microwave, and lift lids cautiously to allow steam to escape

Fryer Safety:

- Provide grease containing units that dump automatically
- Provide fryers that lower food automatically into the hot oil
- Provide and use splash guards on fryers
- Wear protective clothing, use hot pads, potholders, gloves, or mitts
- Shake off excess ice crystals before placing fryer basket in hot oil
- Fill fryer baskets only 1/2 way
- Raise and lower fryer baskets gently
- Do not stand too close to or lean over hot oil
- Keep liquids and beverages away from fryers
- Follow directions when adding new fat or oil and/or when disposing of oil

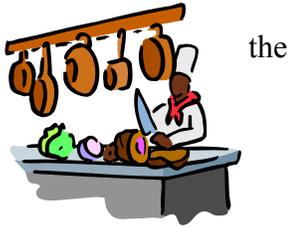


Lacerations

Cuts and punctures (most frequently to hands and fingers) are some of the most common injuries reported in restaurants. Puncture and laceration injuries can be caused from handling knives or cutting equipment, and broken glassware or plates. These types of injuries can be reduced by implementing some simple strategies.

How can laceration injuries be prevented?

- Provide knives that are right size and type for each job
- Provide box cutters for opening boxes
- Provide proper storage for knives (counter racks, wall racks, or storage blocks)
- Provide cut-resistant gloves that cover the wrists, fit well, and have sturdy, tightly-woven seams
- Allow workers enough time to work safely



Knife Safety:

- Keep knives sharp (dull knives are unsafe)
- Keep handles in good repair/ tighten or replace loose handles
- Never leave knives soaking in water
- Place a non-slip pad or damp cloth under cutting boards
- Stop cutting and place knife in a flat, safe place if interrupted
- Pass a knife to colleagues by laying it on a counter, or pass it with blade pointed down
- Never try to catch a falling knife, instead warn others
- Carry and store knives in sheaths or protective cases when possible
- Keep fingers tucked on the hand that's holding the food when cutting



Use Appliances Safely:

Proper use of labor saving devices such as slicers, grinders, and mixers require both effective training when a new employee starts a job and continuous attention, to make certain that employees follow all necessary procedures.

The kitchen supervisor should set an example by using proper work methods on a daily basis and encouraging others to do the same.

Instruction and safety manuals should be readily available for all equipment, should someone need further information.

Slicers: “Zero” the blade after each use. When cleaning the blade be sure the power is off and wipe from center hub to edge to prevent slashing injuries from the edge of the blade.

Grinders/Tenderizers:

Use push stick to feed grinder. Never place fingers in feed openings. Keep guards in place at all times when operating machinery.



Mixers: Make certain beaters are properly fastened, and bowl elevator is locked in position before starting the unit. **Always stop the machine** before removing anything from the mixing bowl.

Dishwashers: Load trays properly. Do not overload or force trays into the machine. If tray is stuck in unit, use long pole with hook to pull back to leading end. Wear rubber gloves to avoid contact with harsh soaps and chemicals.

Warning for Young Workers:

Young workers under the age of 18 are prohibited by law from using many of the appliances commonly found in restaurant kitchens. For more information on laws pertaining to young workers employed in restaurants, contact nearest OSHA office or refer to OSHA's eTool titled *Teen Worker Safety in Restaurants* at <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/youth/restaurant/index.html>



Sprains and Strains

Sprains and strains of muscles and tendons are common among food service workers. Improper lifting and repetitive motions are often associated with sprains, strains, and tear injuries in restaurants.

However, with proper training and open communication between employees and managers, many of these injuries can be prevented.



How can sprain and strain injuries be prevented?

Sprains and strains are easy to prevent, if workers follow a four step approach to proper lifting.

Four Steps to Proper Lifting:

1. Size up the load

- Use a hand truck if possible
- Get help if you need it
- Check for slivers, nails, exposed staples
- Use gloves if necessary
- Make sure you have a clear path before trying to lift heavy objects
- Never lift anything unless you know where you're going to put it down



2. Lift

- Bring the load as close to you as possible before lifting
- Keep your head up, your back straight and bend at your knees and hips
- Lift with your legs, not your back

3. Move

- Keep the load close to your body
- Look where you are going
- Shift your feet to turn, don't twist

4. Get Set and Lower

- When setting a load down, let your leg muscles carry it down
- Make certain your fingers and toes are clear before setting the load down

Clean-up Tasks:

Be aware of all potential hazards when performing clean-up tasks such as washing dishes, clearing tables, mopping floors, and emptying garbage.



These tasks often involve repetitive reaching, overreaching, and lifting, which can lead to neck and back strains and sprains, especially if tasks are performed while assuming awkward postures.

Reduce lifting during garbage removal tasks by using garbage handling bags with wheels or garbage cans with wheels for garbage containers to limit the weight of the load employees must lift and dump.



Limit the size of garbage containers to limit the weight of the load employees must lift and dump.

Install dumpsters at or below grade level.

Rearrange work spaces so it is easier to reach for supplies used routinely and to prevent overreaching and awkward back, shoulder and wrist postures.



Vary repetitive tasks by spacing out activities.

Lower rinse nozzle in the wash sink to rest at mid-body height to reduce overreaching.

Limit size of dirty dish containers to reduce the amount of dirty dishes that can be stacked and carried at one time. If possible, carts should be provided to put dirty dish containers on, to decrease the distance that workers have to carry heavy containers. Employees should also be warned not to overfill containers, or they will have to lift and carry excessive weight.

Slips, Trips, and Falls

One of every three disabling restaurant injuries is the result of slipping, tripping and/or falling. Slip and fall injuries alone cost restaurant chains nearly a million dollars per year.³

Slips and falls can occur on wet or contaminated surfaces and where transitions in floor types occur (e.g., from the dining area to the kitchen).

In restaurants, common sources of slippery floors include dishwashing over-spray or run-off, leaking equipment or pipes, food debris, and spillage from transport of open containers (such as those holding fryer grease and food waste).⁴



Three Key Points:

1. Most slip injuries happen on wet floors
2. Most trips are due to poor housekeeping
3. Plan ahead to deal with any such problems that arise during busy periods when the pace of work increases

How can slip, trip, and fall injuries be prevented?

- ◆ Clean up spills immediately (spilled or dropped food, grease, oil, and water can be extremely dangerous)
- ◆ Place warning signs when mopping or if a slipping hazard is identified
- ◆ Use non-slip matting, no-skid waxes and coat floors with grit, especially in greasy areas
- ◆ Keep aisles and passageways clear at all times
- ◆ Repair holes and rough spots; provide ramps over pipes and other fixed obstructions on the floor
- ◆ Remove tripping hazards, such as cords and hoses, by storing them properly

Wear Appropriate Footwear:

- Wear sturdy shoes with slip-resistant soles and low heels (no leather soles, open toe, platform, or high heels)
- Keep shoes laced and tightly tied
- Avoid porous fabrics such as canvas, which will not protect feet from spills and burns
- Look for a tread that channels liquid out from under the shoe to prevent hydroplaning



Work Smart:

- Pay attention to what is going on around you
- Do not move too quickly or run
- Move cautiously near corners and when carrying things
- Report any blind corners, problem floor surfaces, or hazardous areas



Electrical Safety:

- Make sure guards and other safety devices are in place before using a machine
- Keep cords, plugs, outlets, housings, and blades in good repair
- Keep electrical outlets free of cracks and grease to avoid short circuits
- Place electrical equipment away from water
- Keep hands, face, hair, clothing, and jewelry away from moving parts



- Utilize a locking mechanism and place a written warning on the power source of appliances that are out of order or under repair.

Health and Safety Requires Good Communication



To reduce accidents, injuries, and illnesses everyone must place an emphasis on health and safety issues. Owners, managers, and employees should all feel responsibility for preventing injuries and illnesses in the workplace. Health and safety need to be an integral part of any restaurant's operations.

New Employee Orientation:

Orientation is a critical component for all new employees, especially those less than 18 years of age. Although young workers can add a lot of enthusiasm to your place of business, it is important for them to receive adequate safety training and supervision before starting any new job. Understanding child labor laws such as the hours and jobs teens are prohibited from working can help facilities avoid potential problems.

The following five principles should be applied to maximize the effectiveness of trainings:

- Trainees should understand the purpose of the training
- Information should be organized to maximize effectiveness
- People learn best when they can immediately practice and apply new knowledge and skills
- As trainees practice, they should get feedback
- People learn in different ways, so an effective program will incorporate different kinds of training methods

Implementing a Workplace Training Program:

To implement an effective workplace training program, employers should task one or more people with coordinating the training activities, developing and gathering all necessary materials, and facilitating the process for correcting hazards.

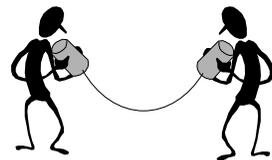


Information on how to implement a health and safety training program in your restaurant is available on the web at http://www.dir.ca.gov/CHSWC/English_Trainers_Guide.pdf and www.osha.gov.

Conduct Regular Trainings:

Health and safety trainings for employees can be one of the most effective ways to reduce workplace accidents, injuries and illnesses. Conducting regular trainings will help employees learn how to avoid hazards and keep lines of communication open with management. This will also enable employees to identify, assess and discuss workplace hazards with management to ensure that hazards are either eliminated or controlled. Conduct regular health and safety training also lets employees know that management is serious about promoting policies and safe workplace practices in your restaurant.

Keep Lines of Communication Open:



- Schedule regular health and safety meetings at convenient times (and during different shifts)
- Facilitate employees bringing concerns forward by informing them of the proper procedures for doing so
- Listen carefully to employee concerns, make note of them, and then provide feedback on how each specific concern will be addressed

Emergency Procedures/Drills:

Do employees at your restaurant know what to do in case of an emergency?

What if there is a fire or other type of emergency at your facility?

Do your employees understand their role?

It is important that everyone knows what their role is if an emergency should arise. Procedures, trainings, and drills can help employees develop the knowledge and skills necessary to understand workplace hazards and safe handling procedures. Through teamwork, employers and employees can work together to prevent workplace accidents, injuries, and illnesses.

Who can I call for help?

Connecticut Department of Public Health
Occupational Health Unit
410 Capitol Ave, MS#11OSP
PO Box 340308
Hartford, CT 06134-0308
(860) 509-7744; Fax (860) 509-7785
<http://www.dph.state.ct.us>

US Department of Labor
Occupational Safety and Health Administration
(OSHA)
1-800-321-OSHA or <http://www.osha.gov>

Connecticut Restaurant Association
Suite 320 100 Roscommon Drive
Middletown, CT 06457
860-635-3334 or 800-382-5619; Fax 860-635-6400
info@ctrestaurant.org



References:

- ¹Source: Professional Safety (May 2003)
- ²Source: Journal of Burn Care & Rehabilitation (2001)
- ³Source: National Restaurant Association
- ⁴Source: Professional Safety (May 2003)

Where can I find more information?

National Restaurant Association
<http://www.restaurant.org>

U.S. Department of Labor
Occupational Safety & Health Administration
<http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/youth/restaurant/index.html>

Labor Occupational Health Program (LOHP)
University of California, Berkeley:

- Restaurant Supervisor Safety Training Program - http://www.dir.ca.gov/CHSWC/English_training_program.pdf
- Restaurant Safety Training Guide - http://www.dir.ca.gov/CHSWC/English_Trainers_Guide.pdf
- Safety Tip Sheets - http://www.dir.ca.gov/CHSWC/English_tipsheets.pdf

Washington Restaurant Association - <http://www.wrahome.com/index.cfm> or 1-800-225-7166

Restaurant Hazards: Practice-based approaches to disabling occupational injuries - Professional Safety: <http://www.asse.org/ps0503courtney.pdf>

Occupational Hazards in Eating and Drinking Places - Compensation and Working Conditions <http://www.bls.gov/opub/cwc/archive/summer2001art4.pdf>

Restaurant Outreach Program: Keeping teen workers safe in restaurants - Washington State Department of Labor and Industries
<http://www.lni.wa.gov/WorkplaceRights/TeenWorkers/JobSafety/RestaurantProgram>

Editor's Note: The information in this article was compiled in part from the sources listed above and the Washington Restaurant Association, the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries, the Occupational Safety & Health Administration, and the Labor Occupational Health Program at the University of California, Berkeley.

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