

PREVENTING MUSCULOSKELETAL DISORDERS (MSDs) IN CATERING

Work in the catering department can be fast paced and often include repetitive tasks. Recognising and understanding the risk factors that contribute to the development of MSDs and implementing strategies to prevent them can reduce these injuries. The NHSF have developed practical guidance and useful tips on the management of MSDs and post injury rehabilitation which are available [here](#).



**Healthy Workplaces Campaign 2020-22
LIGHTEN THE LOAD**
Prevention and management of work-related musculoskeletal disorders



Risk factors to consider:

AWKWARD POSTURES: Tasks which require reaching, carrying and sustained awkward postures may contribute to the risk of back/neck pain and inflammation of the shoulders, neck, and arms.

GRIPPING, PUSHING, PULLING: Exertion while handling utensils, hot/cold pots and pans, boxes, and carts can increase the risk of injury.



REPETITIVE TASKS/MOTIONS: Catering duties such as preparing food including chopping and peeling, cleaning pots, pans, and utensils can require force and repetition. These repetitive tasks can be connected to injury and certain medical conditions.

STATIC POSITIONS: Standing in a fixed position for the majority of the working day can lead to the development of foot conditions and lower limb disorders.

WORK SPACE: Work spaces / environments should be organised in a way to reduce the risk of injury. This will help prevent unnecessary stretching and/or lifting, over-exertion, slips, trips and falls and accidental spills.

Planning your Manual Handling Activities:

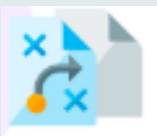
Managers must carry out a [Risk assessment](#) in order to identify and quantify ergonomic risks.



Communicate and consult with employees at all stages of the risk assessment process. This will ensure the nature of the work activities are understood.



Implement appropriate changes in work practices and provision of relevant training and/or equipment.



Manual Handling: Follow the Principles of good Manual Handling as per [HSE's Manual Handling and People Handling Policy, 2018](#) and [Manual Handling Training](#).

Plan for a safe lift—TILE (Task, Individual, Load, Environment)

1. Consider where the lift is to take place and where the load is going
2. Test the weight. Is the lift within your capability, do you need help, is a mechanical aid available
3. Is the load an awkward shape, could the contents be hot/cold?
4. Check for obstructions, slippery floors, etc



Equipment: Manual handling aids can reduce the risk of injury when used correctly and should be used where available. Consider the following:

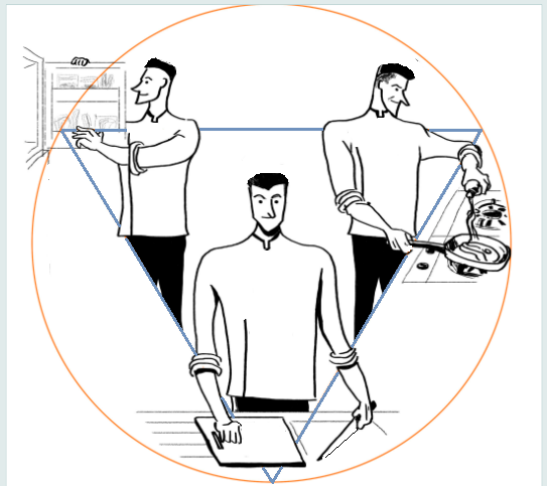
- four-wheeled trolleys (with adjustable height or lockable castors, if needed)
- large mixer bowls on wheeled dollies
- using dishwashing machines
- sack trucks
- false bottoms in deep sinks to reduce awkward bending at the waist
- put heavy equipment such as chest freezers on (lockable) castors to make cleaning routines easier



Some useful tips to preventing MSDs in catering:

- Reduce carrying of trays whenever possible and use equipment where available
- Use both hands to carry large, heavy items such as water jugs, pots, pans
- Ensure that spills are cleaned up immediately to avoid slips and falls
- Get help to lift and move tables, chairs, or any other heavy, awkward items
- Protective footwear/PPE may be required based on risk assessment
- Keep knives sharp to reduce the force required to cut food
- Work at a comfortable height for the task whenever possible
- When standing shift your weight and change positions often
- Consider the use of anti-fatigue mats at standing work stations to reduce fatigue
- Reduce reaching. Keep frequently used items close to / in front of the body

Work Area Layout



Plan work areas to allow for ease of access to frequently used workspaces. This will reduce the risk for unnecessary stretching and/or lifting, over-exertion and slips, trips and falls.

Thermal comfort: Temperatures and humidity can affect the health and comfort of catering staff.

Risks can be reduced by:

- providing good ventilation systems with regular cleaning which will maintain good air quality
- increase airflow within warmer work areas
- awareness of symptoms of cold stress, heat stress and hydration
- adequate task rotation
- ensuring employees clothing and footwear is suitable for working in the environment.
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) may be required as identified through risk assessment (e.g. thermal gloves, thermal clothing, heat resistant gloves)



Stretching a few times during the day can keep joints from cramping and help prevent MSDs.

Some simple stretches can include:



CONTACT US

To log a request for health & safety information, advice or support please go to: <https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/benefits-services/health-and-safety/health-and-safety-helpdesk.html>

Alternatively contact the National Health & Safety Helpdesk on

1800 420 420 between 10:30-12:00 and 14:00 – 15.30 Hrs , Monday to Friday

