

Manual handling café and restaurant industry

*Manual handling is
the most common
hazard in the café
and restaurant
industry.*

*This bulletin is
designed to assist
retailers manage
manual handling
risks.*

Manual handling related injuries account for approximately half of the total lost time injuries/diseases in the café and restaurant industry.

Industry injury data shows that kitchen hands, cooks, waiters and chefs across all age categories sustain the highest number of injuries. Most of the injuries occur when lifting, handling or reaching and most commonly result in sprains and strains of muscles and joints.

The Commission for Occupational Safety and Health *Code of Practice on Manual Handling* outlines a three-step approach to control manual handling risks:

- Identify all hazards associated with manual handling by looking at:
 - actions/postures;
 - load;
 - work environment and layout;
 - work organisation; and
 - skills and experience of workers.
- Assess the risk arising from the hazards.
- Decide on and use appropriate control measure.

The purpose of this bulletin is to identify risks and suggest possible control measures to assist retailers in meeting their obligations under the *Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984*.

Manual handling hazards and possible controls

Actions and postures

Reaching above shoulder height

Many cafés and restaurants require employees to carry out manual handling tasks above shoulder height and below knee height where food, plates and other stored items are kept. When reaching for items above shoulder height, the back is arched and the arms act as long levers, making the load difficult to control and significantly increasing the risk of injuries such as falls, sprains or strains.

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Heavier items and more frequently used items should be stored between knee and chest height. If this is not practical, employees should be provided with adequate means to retrieve and place items in storage areas without lifting above head/shoulder height.

Holding load away from trunk

The risk of injury increases, as the load or arms are held further away from the front of the body. This is most evident when employees reach into display fridges and ovens while cleaning or accessing food.

Consideration should be given to the size and accessibility of display fridges and ovens. Display fridges and ovens are available with a side opening and completely removable doors. When reaching into chest freezers using baskets or other storage options, ensuring clear access around the chest freezer will minimise the reaching involved.

Bending forward to pick up low level loads

Bending forward to pick up loads from a low level may cause strains, particularly to the lower back. To reduce the risk of injury, review storage systems in the kitchen. Ideally, heavier items and more frequently used items should be stored between knee and chest height.

Awkward and static postures while working at workbenches and sinks

Awkward and static postures are a hazard, especially when working at benches or sinks for long periods of time particularly if the surfaces have not been set at appropriate heights. Such tasks include hand washing/scrubbing dishes in troughs that are too deep and cutting or preparing food at benches that are either too low or too high for the worker. It is not always practical or feasible to provide adjustable surfaces. Individuals can raise themselves up by standing on low, stable platforms to work at surfaces that are too high. Platforms on the floor should be placed in a position/area where they are not a trip hazard.

The load

Moving plates

Moving large numbers of plates and crockery is a high-risk task. They may be heavy, fragile and often hot. Where practical, this task should be eliminated by using mechanical equipment such as a spring-loaded, heated plate dispenser. These can be used in both a kitchen and dining area. People in control of the workplace should ensure that carrying large amounts of plates and crockery manually is eliminated or reduced.

Moving pots and other heavy containers

Moving containers full of water and other liquids to and from a bain marie, oil to and from the fryer, are high-risk tasks. Where possible, containers should not be carried while full of liquids. Consideration should be given to:

- > connecting a bain marie to the plumbing so that manually moving containers full of water is eliminated;
- > the use of suitable trolleys; and
- > reducing the size of the containers used to move liquids to reduce the weight that is carried.



Spring-loaded, heated plate dispenser

For the movement of oil, there are several mechanical aids that may be of assistance. Examples include mechanical fat transport systems, or pumps that move the oil without actually having to handle it. Where a mechanical aid is not practical, the oil should be carried in a suitable container, such as a bucket with sturdy handle and secure lid. Spills of fat and oil can be a serious slip hazard.

Carrying large amounts of cooked food in pots should be avoided. Food should be transferred straight to the plate from the pot or to smaller containers in order to carry them to a serving area. The use of trolleys may reduce the hazard.

Environment

Handling stock

Many cafés and restaurants receive bulk deliveries of goods. Handling bulk deliveries is another high-risk task. Where possible, the deliveries should be placed near where they will be stored. If this is not practical, place the goods where they will not cause a slip, trip or fall hazard.

When placing stock into storage, heavier items and more frequently used items should be stored between knee and chest height. If that is not practical, workers should be provided with a stepladder or safety step to reduce reaching above shoulder height. Consideration should also be given to using bulk storage bins for products such as flour and rice.

Stock levels should be managed to ensure there is adequate room to store items in shelving and storage areas.

Movement around workplace

The kitchen should be designed for ease of movement, work flow and work activity. When designing the layout of the restaurant, good kitchen access needs to be considered with no variations in floor levels, if possible.

Work organisation

Repetitive movement

Repetitive movements are associated with occupational overuse injuries. Where possible, repetitive tasks such as cutting and cleaning should be limited by having varied tasks, job rotation and frequent cycle breaks. There are many other risk factors associated with overuse injuries, such as constrained and/or awkward postures and forceful movements.

Duration of tasks

Long and unusual working hours may contribute to physical and mental fatigue. Duration of work periods and work rosters organised are two such factors which may be monitored and modified to reduce the risks associated with fatigue. For further information look at the *Code of Practice: Working Hours*.

Work pace

Time constraints and increasing demands in the service industries are potential risk factors for manual handling injuries and slips, trips and falls in the workplace. Staff may be pressured to work too quickly or carry/move increased loads to meet customer demands. Staff numbers and rostering relative to work demands should be monitored and modified accordingly to reduce such risks.



Mechanical fat transport system

Reducing other manual handling hazards

- Where possible, eliminate or minimise manual handling by using appropriate equipment, such as suitable trolleys.
- Workplace lay-out should be suitable for workflow and storage needs.
- The workplace needs to be kept tidy to minimise slip, trip and fall hazards.
- Workers should be made aware of manual handling risks factors and how to use the risk management approach to minimise such risks.

What the law says

Employers have a responsibility under the *Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984* (the Act) to provide and maintain a safe working environment. Fulfilling this obligation includes abiding by the requirement that it is the responsibility of the employer to, as far as practicable:

- identify each hazard to which a person is likely to be exposed;
- assess the risk of injury or harm to a person resulting from each hazard;
- consider the means by which that risk may be reduced; and
- reduce the risk.

Employees have a responsibility under the Act to take reasonable care for their own safety and health and that of others.

Penalties

There are serious consequences for individuals and organisations resulting from a failure to abide by the law.

Failure to comply with occupational safety and health laws can attract penalties of up to:

- \$25,000 for employees;
- \$250,000 for employers; and
- \$400,000 for organisations.

More information?

Further information on the manual handling risk management process can be found in the:

- *Code of practice: Manual handling; and*
- *Slips, trips and falls in the cafe and restaurant industry - Bulletin 3/2007.*

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