



Injuries from hazardous manual tasks (Musculoskeletal disorders) are the highest cause of lost time injury to employees working in cafes and restaurants. While many injuries are caused by using force to lift, carry, push or hold objects, repetitive actions and sustained or awkward postures are also significant risk factors.

Examples of common hazardous manual tasks include:

- accessing and storing food, plates and other items above shoulder height, below mid-thigh and away from the body may lead to repeatedly adopting awkward postures;
- cleaning tables, work benches, kitchens and other service areas which may be repetitive and may lead to adopting awkward postures;
- washing pots and larger dishes which may require bending over and reaching into sinks, possibly with force while scrubbing;
- chopping and cutting food which can be repetitive and may lead to adopting awkward postures;
- lifting or carrying heavy, fragile and hot plates, food dishes or pots;
- lifting or carrying containers with liquids that may be hot (eg out/into fryers, bain marie, stock);
- handling awkward or heavy loads (including moving deliveries or stock, accessing stored items);
- moving chairs and tables requiring repetitive actions and awkward postures;
- reaching into chest freezers which can lead to adopting awkward postures; and
- exposing employees to prolonged or sustained postures can have a cumulative effect and lead to physical and mental fatigue and injuries.

Tips to control the risks

Your first priority should always be to eliminate the hazardous manual tasks entirely, if reasonably practicable. Examples of ways to eliminate a hazardous manual task include providing a fluid pump to transfer liquid between containers rather than handle the containers full of liquid; or providing pot-washing dishwashers. If the task cannot be eliminated then modifying or redesigning the source of the risk will be the next level of control to consider. Control measures that could be implemented to reduce the risk of injury are listed below.

Environment, space and lay-out

- design the restaurant and kitchen for ease of movement, work flow and work activity;
- replace or repair uneven or slippery floors;
- provide trolley ramps at changes in floor level;
- install automatic doors if staff have to carry things through them frequently;
- provide foot rails or a step to shift body weight and reduce stress on employees' lower back and legs, when standing for prolonged periods;
- consider workbenches of different heights particularly for chopping and food preparation to reduce the risks associated with bending forward or reaching;
- connect the bain marie to the plumbing to eliminate manually moving containers of water;
- place large mixers at a height that allows access to the mixing bowl handles between knuckle and elbow height - this will reduce bending at the waist;
- organise storage areas as close to the working area as possible to reduce carrying distances;
- consider keeping food localised, e.g. installing chilled storage under working surfaces;
- purchase bulk goods in smaller, easier to handle containers;
- consider the height and location of shelving or racks, including the height of a microwave; and
- to avoid reaching into a chest freezer use baskets or other storage options and ensure clear access around the chest freezer for easy access.

Equipment and mechanical aids

- provide a wheeled dolly to move heavy items stored at floor level – dollies should have handles for pushing and/or be high enough that workers do not have to bend excessively to reach the item;
- use sack trucks;
- use mechanical aids or pumps to transport liquid waste such as oil;

- provide false bottoms in deep sinks to reduce awkward bending at the waist;
- where practicable, eliminate the task of reaching to access plates by using mechanical equipment such as a spring-loaded, heated plate dispenser in kitchen and or dining areas;
- transfer food straight from a pot to the plate or into smaller containers to carry to the serving area;
- provide rollers or conveyors to transport items within a set process;
- provide trolleys to transport food or large quantities of dishes (eg use four-wheeled trolleys with adjustable height or lockable castors, if needed);
- provide personal protective equipment such as appropriate gloves and non-slip shoes where required - gloves should have extra grip on palms and fingertips to reduce the gripping force needed to handle greasy dishes;
- provide utensils and knives with ergonomic handles and those that allow for power grips;
- provide machines and tools to reduce manual chopping of vegetables or buy pre-cut vegetables; and
- provide long-handled brushes to reduce awkward postures when cleaning items or equipment.

Nature of load

- purchase cooking oil in containers that minimise force and awkward postures to handle (eg with sturdy handles/grips);
- ensure used oil is cooled down and moved in small containers with a secure lid and sturdy handle;
- break down trays of products before loading onto storage shelving;
- use smaller containers for cleaning chemicals and/or appropriate siphons or pumps to avoid handling bulk containers;
- put heavy equipment such as chest freezers on lockable castors to make cleaning easier;
- consider reducing the size of bins to reduce the weight of refuse bags;
- put up signs near bins to remind staff not to overfill them; and
- reduce carrying large amounts of plates and crockery manually by using lighter weight plates and crockery and/or by providing appropriate trolleys for the movement of crockery in the workplace.

Work organisation and practices

- arrange delivery of goods close to the storage area;
- where possible, limit repetitive tasks such as cutting and cleaning by having varied tasks, job rotation and frequent breaks;
- keep a maintenance schedule of equipment such as knives and trolleys;
- store heavy items on shelves at waist height – consider the use of bulk storage bins on casters for items such as flour and rice;
- reorganise the layout of the kitchen to avoid twisting, reaching and other awkward postures;
- ensure employees' clothing and footwear is suitable for working in a kitchen environment, eg slip-resistant footwear and clothing that is not restrictive;
- to avoid adverse effects of working in cool temperatures provide protective clothing, eg thermal gloves and jackets in cold storage areas; and
- provide manual task training to all staff, including staff that can influence how manual tasks are performed – training should include the risk management approach and task specific training.

Further information

- [WA Manual tasks - Code of practice](#)
- [Training package](#)
 - Manual tasks training package - Presenters guide
 - Power point presentation
- VIDEO: [Manual tasks risk management](#) - Running time: 11:32 mins
- WORKSHEET: [Manual tasks incident investigation](#)
- WORKSHEET: [Manual tasks risk management tool](#)
- [Risk management checklist for manual tasks](#)
- [Industry checklist for restaurants](#)

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