



Kitchen tip: Don't overheat the oil in a deep fryer. If the oil is smoking, it's too hot.

The recipe for kitchen safety? Training and awareness

By Gord Woodward

More than 60 percent of injuries in the food service industry involve kitchen workers. While some kitchen injuries can be handled with a first-aid kit, others may require extensive time off work for recovery. This Safety Talk offers tips that can be shared with workers during safety meetings or pinned to your safety bulletin board.

Kitchens have many of the ingredients for a hazardous workplace: Lots of sharp, heavy, or hot objects. A demanding pace. A steady stream of new employees.

Mixing them together doesn't have to be a recipe for injury, though. Training and safe work practices can help ensure workers return home at the end of every shift in the same condition as when they arrived. To keep orders on time, "there are a lot of efficiencies that have to happen in kitchens," says Isabel Chung, executive chef at Fairmont Chateau Whistler. "But

efficiency doesn't negate our responsibility to work in a safe and clean environment."

Here are five tips to reduce the risk of injury to kitchen workers:

1 Be sharp when using knives

Cuts from knives are among the most common injuries in a kitchen. To prevent them, make sure you're properly trained in knife use. Ask for hands-on training and supervision.

Wear cut-resistant gloves whenever possible. Secure the cutting board to the counter, cut away from your body when trimming or deboning, and put down the knife when you're distracted by whatever is happening around you.

The golden rule? "A sharp knife is a safe knife," says Jeff Szombaty, executive chef with Hyatt Regency. "A dull knife will slip off of food and then slip into your finger."

2 You can stand the heat in the kitchen if you take precautions

Deep fryers and hot pots and pans can burn and scald you. To be safe, always assume they're hot and use oven mitts or dry cloths when handling them. Open lids away from your body. "Some of the worst burns you get are actually from the steam," says Dennis Green, an executive chef with go2HR. Alert your work colleagues if you set a hot pan anywhere outside your work station.

When it comes to deep fryers, operate or clean them only if you've been properly trained. Don't overheat the oil; it shouldn't smoke. Make sure all food and utensils are dry; and lower them slowly into the fryer to avoid spattering. Clean the fryer regularly.

Seek first aid right away if you do get burned. And if there's an oil fire, never use water to extinguish it. Instead, cover the flames with a fire-smothering blanket or damp cloth.

3 No matter how you slice it, safety comes first

Meat slicers have the potential to cause severe injury, so only use one if you've been trained and understand the operating instructions.

Secure the blade guard in position before turning it on, and use the meat grip to keep your hands away from the blade. Remove meat only after the cutting wheel comes to a complete stop.

Before cleaning, unplug the machine and set the blade adjustment to zero. Wearing Kevlar gloves, wipe the blade upward from the centre.

Unplug the machine when it's not in use. Make sure the switch is set to "Off" before plugging it back in.

4 Slowing down can save time

Rushing around in a kitchen isn't safe. If you slip, trip, or fall, it could cost you time off work. To prevent those types of injuries, think of your well-fitting, non-slip footwear as part of your uniform. Keep the area clear of boxes and other clutter so you can always see where you're going, especially when you're carrying large objects.

Blind corners are a serious hazard, so always announce your presence before you round one. Walk carefully in and around walk-in freezers, because floors can become wet and slippery from condensation. Mop them right away and place a "Wet floor" sign there.

5 Your back is one of your most important tools

A back injury from improper lifting can affect your career. "Your back is probably the most important tool you're going to have," says Szombaty.

Avoid carrying or lifting items that are slippery, too hot, or unevenly balanced. When you have to lift something, get close to it, bend your knees, and get a good grip. Push up with your legs. Pivot with your feet rather than twisting your back. Lift smoothly and slowly and keep the load between your knees and shoulders.

You can avoid some strain by storing heavy things at waist level. And, use a dolly or cart whenever possible, or ask someone to help you.

For more information

WorkSafeBC's video series on kitchen safety offers tips from experienced industry professionals. You can view the series at worksafebc.com/kitchensafety.

Employers can review their responsibilities for providing a safe workplace by searching for "tourism & hospitality" at worksafebc.com. 🗣️



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