

ERGO Tips

Preventing Injuries in the Kitchen

Kitchen and hospitality staff are exposed to awkward positions and repetitive tasks on a daily basis. Ergonomic principles can be applied to work tasks in order to reduce stresses on the body and reduce the potential for injury while at work.

Our bodies function best in a neutral position. When moving in the kitchen, we frequently encounter awkward positions. Examples include standing for long periods, reaching overhead, reaching below the knees, twisting, prolonged grasping, reaching across wide counters, exerting force in a downward motion, or lifting hot and heavy pots. To reduce exposure, practice these tips:

- Reduce your reach. Keep your work close to your body.
- Tilt bins or boxes toward you.
- Store frequently used items between shoulder and hip height.
- Position frequently used items close to the work area at a convenient height.
- Use a cart to move items when possible to eliminate carrying them.
- Perform light work at or slightly above elbow height, i.e. decorating cakes/pastries, candies.
- Complete forceful tasks at/or slightly below waist height, i.e. chopping, kneading, and cutting.
- Turn your entire body when reaching for and retrieving items to avoid twisting the back.
- Wear shoes with cushioning, support, and anti-slip treads. Replace shoes or insoles when worn.
- Use anti-fatigue mats or shift weight between legs to reduce stress on the back. Try alternating placement of feet on a step or rail when standing for long periods.
- Use utensils that allow a whole hand power grasp rather than utensils with small handles that require pinching.
- Take frequent “microbreaks.” Let muscles relax and periodically move in the opposite direction of the position you have been working in. for example, if you have been looking down to decorate a cake, stretch your neck and stretch your arms overhead.
- When performing repetitive tasks, vary the tasks by using different muscle groups, or pace yourself.
- Chose the correct tool for the job. Select utensils with good grips and comfortable handles to reduce grip force and awkward postures.
- Keep knives sharp to decrease the amount of cutting force. Store them on a magnetic strip or keep them in a knife block. Do not keep them laying in a drawer.

