

# Injury Prevention in Commercial Kitchens

Don't let kitchen hazards injure workers on the job. Everyone is needed.



The restaurant industry is a vital economic sector in the United States. It is estimated over 15 million people, which is about 10 percent of the overall U.S. workforce, are restaurant workers.<sup>1</sup> Given the large number of people needed, it is no surprise that restaurant leadership cite staffing as a challenge. Regardless of whether you're the restaurant owner, a kitchen manager, a career-focused employee or are just starting out, don't let kitchen hazards lead to injuries on the job. Everyone is needed. All kitchens are a bit different, so exposures change. However, common hazards include cuts, burns, slips/falls, strain/sprains, and chemical contact injuries.

## Cut Prevention Tips

- Slicers should be used, cleaned, and stored in accordance with the manufacturer's operating instructions.
- Ensure all employees are trained prior to working with electric slicers and other powered equipment.
- A sharp knife allows the cutter to have more control while cutting. Planned knife sharpening is important to ensure dull blades are not available to use.
- Cutting should be done on surfaces that are knife-friendly, such as wooden or plastic cutting boards. Ensure the cutting board is secured to prevent it from slipping. Using a clean damp cloth beneath the board may help prevent slipping.



- Only use knives as designed and avoid rushing.
- Fruits and vegetables should be cut so they have a flat side. They should then be placed flat side down on the cutting board for stability before slicing.
- Fingers should be kept out of the cutting area. When appropriate, a cut-resistant glove should be worn on the non-knife handling hand.
- Knives should never be placed where they can be hidden, such as a sink of water, in towels, or other concealing locations.
- If a knife needs to be passed to another person, it should be placed on the surface so the other person to pick it up.
- When walking with a knife, the knife should be held straight down at the worker's side, with the sharp edge facing behind them.
- Knives should be stored in a safe manner such as in a wood block, magnetic racks, knife trays, etc.

### Burn Prevention Tips

- Open flames need to be adjusted to cover only the bottom heating area of the pan.
- Handles on cookware must not extend into the walking area.
- Towels, long-hair, and clothing should be kept away from open flames.
- Maintain proper distances between open flame cookers and oil fryers. Oil laden air can be ignited by open flames.<sup>2</sup>
- Appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) should be used. This may include oven mitts, pot-holders, eye-protection, rubberized aprons, or others.
- Keep the grill and stove surface clean to help prevent grease buildup.
- Get help moving heavy pots of hot/simmering liquids.

### Slip and Fall Prevention Tips

- Floor walking areas should be clean and free of obstructions. If a spill occurs, it should to be cleaned and dried immediately.
- Slip-resistant shoes with should be worn, and soles cleaned as needed prior to each shift.
- Maintain walkways in good condition. Replace mats that are worn.
- Provide ladders or stepstools to access elevated items. Train employees in their safe usage.
- Workers should avoid manually carrying loads that obstruct their view of the walking path.

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### Strain/Sprain Prevention Tips

- Store heavy and bulky items in the “strike zone.” The strike zone is between knee and armpit height.
- Employees should know how to safely lift, push/pull, and carry items handled in the kitchen and walk-ins.
- Push carts or hand trucks should be used when possible.
- Use two person lifts for heavy or awkward material handling.

### Chemical Safety Tips

- Maintain a list of all chemicals and their respective safety data sheets (SDS’s) on-site and accessible.
- Appropriately dispose of all chemicals that are no longer needed.
- Employees should know the health and physical hazards of the chemicals they work with or are likely to encounter. Training should include how to use and dispose of them safely.
- Keep all original or secondary containers labelled. OSHA’s hazard communication standard has specific labelling requirements.
- Make sure required personal protective equipment and emergency/first-aid equipment listed on the SDS’s are available and ready for use.



This is a summary of common hazards that injure restaurant workers every day while on the job. By knowing the hazards and how to control them, injuries can be avoided.

### References

<sup>1</sup> [Upserve: Restaurant Employment Statistics](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Nationwide Loss Control Services - Fire Protection in Commercial Kitchens](#)

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