Lifting Safely in Healthcare Food Services

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

When we think of injuries from lifting in a healthcare workplace, we are likely to think of back injuries resulting from patient lifts. However, these injuries can happen to workers in any department, including food service.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

Consider these situations which can lead to stress and strain injuries in kitchen workers:

- Lifting and carrying full pots and pans in the kitchen.
- Lifting and carrying drums and bags of food.
- Bending into deep freezers and fryers to clean inside them.
- Lifting and stacking dishwasher trays.
- Carrying plates and glasses in trays.
- Reaching across counters and into storage shelves.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

These are some methods for reducing the injuries caused by lifting and carrying in food service:

- Look for ways to prevent lifting and carrying. For example, when new equipment is being considered for purchase, talk to your supervisor about how it will be used and cleaned. Ask if it will be heavy or awkward to move. Examples of alternatives are self-cleaning units for deep fryers which can reduce the need for lifting, carrying and working in awkward postures.
- Talk to your supervisor about the possibility of a trash chute system or other equipment to reduce the need for

carrying garbage containers. Wheeled trash bins can reduce the effort required to move them.

- Use mechanical aids wherever possible to eliminate manual lifting. Pallet jacks and handcarts can be used for unloading trucks into food storage areas.
- See if it is possible to purchase food and supplies for the kitchen packed in smaller loads.
- Likewise, consider using smaller pots and pans.
- Find other ways to split and reduce loads to make them lighter and easier to handle.
- Work with suppliers who do the restocking themselves.
- Try to avoid storing heavy items above shoulder level.
- Avoid filling the shelves too far back, so you do not have to stretch to reach items.
- Use safe stepladders or stools to reach high shelves.
- If you stand and walk while you work, do something different on your breaks. Sit and rest, and move around too.
- Rotate equipment cleaning tasks to avoid working too long in one position and to reduce repetitive motion.
- Use footwear with cushioned, non-slip soles.
- Use mats for cushioning if you must stand for long periods. Put one foot up on a footrest. Sit on a stool part of the time if possible.

FINAL WORD

Back injuries and repetitive strain injuries are problems we can all do without. Good planning and safe work practices can help prevent these injuries in the food service department and throughout the healthcare workplace.