Restaurant Ergonomics Meeting Kit

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Restaurant ergonomics refers to the study and application of designing restaurant workspaces, tools, and equipment in a way that optimizes efficiency, productivity, and safety for both employees and customers.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

RESTAURANT ERGONOMIC HAZARDS

- **Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSDs):** One of the most common hazards of poor restaurant ergonomics is the development of MSDs such as tendinitis, carpal tunnel syndrome, and lower back pain. Repetitive motions, awkward postures, and heavy lifting are some of the factors that can contribute to the development of MSDs.
- **Slip, Trip, and Fall Hazards:** Poor restaurant ergonomics can also lead to slip, trip, and fall hazards. Cluttered workspaces, uneven floors, and poorly placed equipment can increase the risk of slips, trips, and falls, which can lead to serious injuries such as broken bones, sprains, and head injuries.
- **Burns and Cuts:** Restaurant workers are also at risk of burns and cuts due to exposure to hot surfaces, sharp knives, and other kitchen tools. Poorly designed equipment, inadequate training, and improper use of tools can all contribute to these hazards.
- **Noise-Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL):** Restaurant workers are often exposed to high levels of noise from kitchen equipment such as blenders, grinders, and dishwashers. Prolonged exposure to these noise levels can lead to NIHL, which can cause permanent hearing damage.

- **Eye Strain:** Poor lighting and poorly designed workspaces can lead to eye strain, which can cause headaches, blurred vision, and other vision problems. Restaurant workers who spend long hours in poorly lit areas are particularly at risk of eye strain.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

THE IMPORTANCE OF RESTAURANT ERGONOMICS

- **Employee Health and Safety:** Proper restaurant ergonomics can help reduce the risk of musculoskeletal injuries and strains, which are common in the restaurant industry due to the repetitive motions and awkward postures involved in tasks such as chopping, stirring, and lifting heavy pots and pans.
- **Productivity:** Effective restaurant ergonomics can help improve employee productivity by reducing the amount of time and effort required to perform tasks.
- **Customer Satisfaction:** Ergonomics can play a significant role in creating a comfortable and inviting atmosphere that encourages customers to return.
- **Compliance:** Restaurants must comply with federal, state, and local regulations related to workplace safety and health. Proper ergonomics can help ensure compliance with these regulations.
- **Reputation:** A restaurant’s reputation is essential to its success. Customers are more likely to return and recommend a restaurant that provides a comfortable, safe, and efficient dining experience.

INJURY PREVENTION AT RESTAURANTS

Running a restaurant is a team effort and every worker has a role to play. Even though the hazards may be different for each role, the key concepts for injury prevention remain the same.

Wait staff. Taking orders and delivering food to customers means that servers tend to get plenty of walking activity and move frequently.

Encourage servers to:

- Carry trays close to the body and use two hands whenever possible. Try not to overload the trays.
- Avoid overreaching. Bring cups and glasses close closer to your body when refilling drinks and hand plates to customers to reduce reaches.
- Alternate hands for carrying.

How to help the kitchen staff:

- Keep knives sharp. Dull knives increase the force required to cut.
- Provide adjustable height workstations or lifts. Table height should be 2-3 inches below the worker's elbow to improve posture and reduce injury.
- Use anti-fatigue mats with drain holes to reduce slipping and reduce pressure on the feet and knees.
- Store frequently used items close to the worker. Avoid storing items below knee level or above shoulder level.

Dishwashers and clean-up staff

During the cleaning process, dishwashers and bussers may need to handle heavy racks of dishes and glasses, which can be difficult to handle. Ensure that you train workers in proper handling of these racks.

HOW TO ADDRESS RESTAURANT ERGONOMICS

Implement Workstation Adjustments: Adjust workstations and equipment to fit the individual needs of employees. Provide adjustable chairs, tables, and computer monitors to support proper posture and reduce the risk of musculoskeletal injuries.

Promote Breaks and Rotation: Encourage regular breaks for employees to rest and stretch their muscles. Implement task rotation schedules to distribute physical demands evenly among employees and reduce overuse injuries.

Regular Maintenance and Inspections: Regularly inspect and maintain equipment to ensure it is in proper working condition.

Malfunctioning or broken equipment can increase the risk of accidents and injuries.

Foster Communication: Encourage open communication between employees and management regarding any ergonomic concerns or suggestions. Actively listen to employees' feedback and address their concerns promptly.

Stay Informed: Keep up with the latest research, and best practices related to restaurant ergonomics. Attend workshops, consult experts, and stay informed about industry-specific ergonomic recommendations.

Monitor and Evaluate: Continuously monitor the effectiveness of ergonomic measures implemented in the restaurant. Evaluate their impact on employee health, productivity, and customer satisfaction.

FINAL WORD

By prioritizing proper ergonomics, restaurants can create a safe and efficient work environment that supports employee well-being and contributes to the success of the business.