

PRESS RELEASE

Cooks Easily Suffer from Sore Muscles

A survey conducted in 2010 by the Institute of Occupational Safety and Health showed that in Taiwan 63.27% of the working population have problems with musculoskeletal pain. According to statistics from the Bureau of Labor Insurance, the percentage of people suffering from musculoskeletal disorders has been increasing year after year, from 58% in 2000 to 85% in 2010, which shows that musculoskeletal disorders is a serious problem indeed and must not be neglected.

Since time began, food and eating has always been essential for mankind, and the art of cooking a profession indispensable in society. The working processes in this profession still largely rely on human work and cannot be replaced by automation. In addition, after the establishment of free weekends in many professions and due to the Government's efforts to develop tourism industry over the recent years, the working time and workload of professionals in gastronomy have increased considerably, and as a consequence, musculoskeletal disorders or pain have become even more frequent. To assess the situation of musculoskeletal problems among people working in the gastronomy sector, the Institute of Occupational Safety and Health conducted a sample survey among cooks all over the country with the help of a questionnaire. The results of the survey show that 82% of the cooks had musculoskeletal problems, most of which consisted in aching shoulders (60%), followed by neck problems (56%) and pain in the hips or the lower part of the back; all of which indicates that musculoskeletal disorders are indeed very common among cooks.

The reasons for musculoskeletal problems are manifold, e.g. the working environment, strain on certain parts of the body, posture of work, repetitious working movements, opportunities to take a rest, work pressure and other factors. Cooks usually work in a standing position, which puts strain on hips, back and legs; whereas the food preparation mainly requires repetitious movements of the upper body and the arms; and besides the preparing of food, the carrying of heavy loads is also to be considered. All these factors cause many risks for muscles and bones in the lower

back, shoulders, neck and arms. In the research it was shown that the stress on muscles and bones was strongest when movements of stirring or shaking were involved, and when heavy loads had to be carried frequently. Also, persons working in gastronomy who have a higher body mass index are even more liable to suffer from muscular pain.

Ergonomic techniques developed by the Institute can offer holistic and effective solutions to reduce the risk of musculoskeletal problems caused by the working environment and working processes for employees working in gastronomy. Measures have been developed to counteract the various factors leading to health risks in kitchens, e.g. it was attempted to make the work movements more fluent, work surfaces and surrounding equipment were designed according to the measurements of the human body, cooking tools were disposed more ready to hand, it was tried to make the working posture and movements less exhausting and to improve the coordination of working and resting periods to prevent overwork, while the training of employees and administrative changes were also promoted. All these approaches can effectively reduce the risk of musculoskeletal disorders. Employees who already suffer from sore muscles should seek medical help to get an appropriate cure, and do regular relaxation exercises, strengthen certain muscular areas and improve metabolism to lessen the impact of sore muscles and to restore their health. The Institute of Occupational Safety and Health has developed a series of relaxation techniques to help physical ability at work, 10-40 minutes of exercise daily can strengthen the body and reduce the risk of sore muscles.