Cooks – Fact Sheets



WHAT DOES A COOK DO?

The main duties of cooks in restaurants, hotels, healthcare facilities and schools include the following:

- Plan and prepare menus, and determine food portions and quantities needed.
- Pay attention to special dietary needs, if applicable.
- Monitor and order supplies.
- Clean up kitchen or work area.
- Supervise kitchen staff.

What are some health and safety issues for cooks?

Working with food presents its own unique set of potential hazards. Some of the main ones are:

- Handling raw meat and poultry.
- Exposure to various chemicals, which may include paints, solvents, pesticides, perfumes, or cleaning products.
- Working in awkward positions or performing repetitive manual tasks.
- Excessive standing.
- Lifting or carrying heavy trays.
- Risk of accidental radiation leaks from microwave ovens.
- Working in extreme temperatures.
- Working with knives, mincers, and other dangerous tools or equipment.
- Risk of burns or fire from ovens, deep-fat fryers, and steam from pots.
- Slips, trips and falls.
- Stress.
- Bullying.
- Working alone.
- Fire.
- Fatigue or other health effects of shift work or extended work days.

What are some preventive measures for cooks?

- Wash hands frequently.
- Learn safe lifting techniques.
- Know how to work with all equipment and tools required for the job.

- Keep the work area tidy.
- Do not exceed the capacity of the shelves when storing food or supplies.
- Conduct regular inspections of the equipment and identify defects. Have equipment removed from service until fixed or replaced.
- Take breaks. Change tasks to reduce repetitive strain injuries.
- Establish good housekeeping practices.
- Learn safe handling and storage procedures before working with hazardous products.
- Wear appropriate personal protective equipment, including safety shoes with non-skid soles, and eye protection.
- Keep a first-aid kit within easy access.
- Learn fire safety and emergency evacuation procedures, including how to assist customers when evacuating.
- Do not block fire-exits and fire-extinguishers.
- Keep a mobile phone or other alternative means to contact a designated person when working alone.
- Know how to report hazards.

What are some good general safe work practices?

- Practice safe lifting techniques.
- Find ways to minimize musculoskeletal disorders on the job.
- Inspect the work area before each shift.
- Exercise caution when working with knives and other sharp equipment.
- Store tools in the designated areas after use.
- Use, maintain and store personal protective equipment according to manufacturers’ recommendations.
- Follow company safety rules.
- Follow good housekeeping procedures.
- Participate in WHMIS education and training. Follow labels, and read the safety data sheet (SDS) for any hazardous product that you use and follow recommended safety precautions.

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