

Cafe and restaurant industry

Heat stress

Cooking makes the kitchen environment hot and humid, and the situation is even worse in summer. Working in hot, humid conditions may lead to heat stress, especially if there is a low level of air movement, poor ventilation and if the employees are unused to working in heat.

When working in a hot environment, the body needs to disperse heat more effectively. It does this in two ways - quicker blood circulation and sweating. As sweating drains the body of water and salt, these must be replenished, otherwise, the loss of water and minerals (salts) will lead to health problems.

A person who is not used to working in hot conditions is more likely to suffer from heat-caused illness than a person who is acclimatized.

When the body cannot disperse heat effectively, the heat may cause the following symptoms:

- headaches, weakness, giddiness, nausea or vomiting
- irritability and poor decision making
- fainting
- painful muscle cramps
- heat stroke (person may be confused, and may stagger or collapse).

In a hot environment if a person becomes confused or staggers or collapses it is a medical emergency and an ambulance or doctor should be called. It is possible to die from heat stroke.

Possible solutions

Help workers to keep cool

- The kitchen should have an efficient ventilation system to remove steam.
- Hot air rises. Stoves should have an exhaust hood to remove heat.
- Staff should be advised to drink plenty of non-caffeinated drinks to replenish fluids in their bodies.
- Locate work stations away from heat sources.
- Provide rest breaks for workers in a cool area, ensure they have access to cool drinking water.
- Ensure air conditioning and ventilation systems are serviced on a regular basis.
- Train workers about the risks of heat stress.

An ideal working environment should have a temperature range between 20°C to 26°C and a relative humidity between 40% to 70%. When working in an environment with a comfortable temperature and humidity range, staff will work more efficiently and the likelihood of accidents will be reduced.

For more information on heat stress and workplace health and safety issues visit www.dir.qld.gov.au

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