

# A BODY MAP TO KITCHEN INJURIES

By HELEN HOLLYMAN    Illustrated by JON ADAMS

Chefs, like athletes, are susceptible to a wide range of physical impairments. The gnarly combination of long hours and submarinelike spatial conditions in the average kitchen can put pressure on every part of a chef's body; injuries can occur when muscles, joints, and bones are forced into overdrive, or when hours in the kitchen end up lasting longer than any sporting event (without the benches or waterboys). Here's a guide to some common cooking-related injuries—and some ways to fix them—compiled with the help of physical therapist Karena Wu. Wu, who has worked as a physical therapist since 2000, began working with chefs in 2004. Wylie Dufresne was her first client; Karena diagnosed him with tennis elbow one night in the kitchen at wd~50, and then proceeded to explain exactly how he'd gotten it. She's been working with him every Saturday ever since.

**NECK** CERVICAL SPRAIN/STRAIN; KYPHOSIS (HUNCHBACK OR SLOUCHED POSTURE). Daily kitchen duties, from chopping to mixing, kneading to sautéing, take place at countertop height, requiring chefs to curve their necks forward to see their hands. Known as the "forward-flexed" position, this stance takes a toll on the neck.

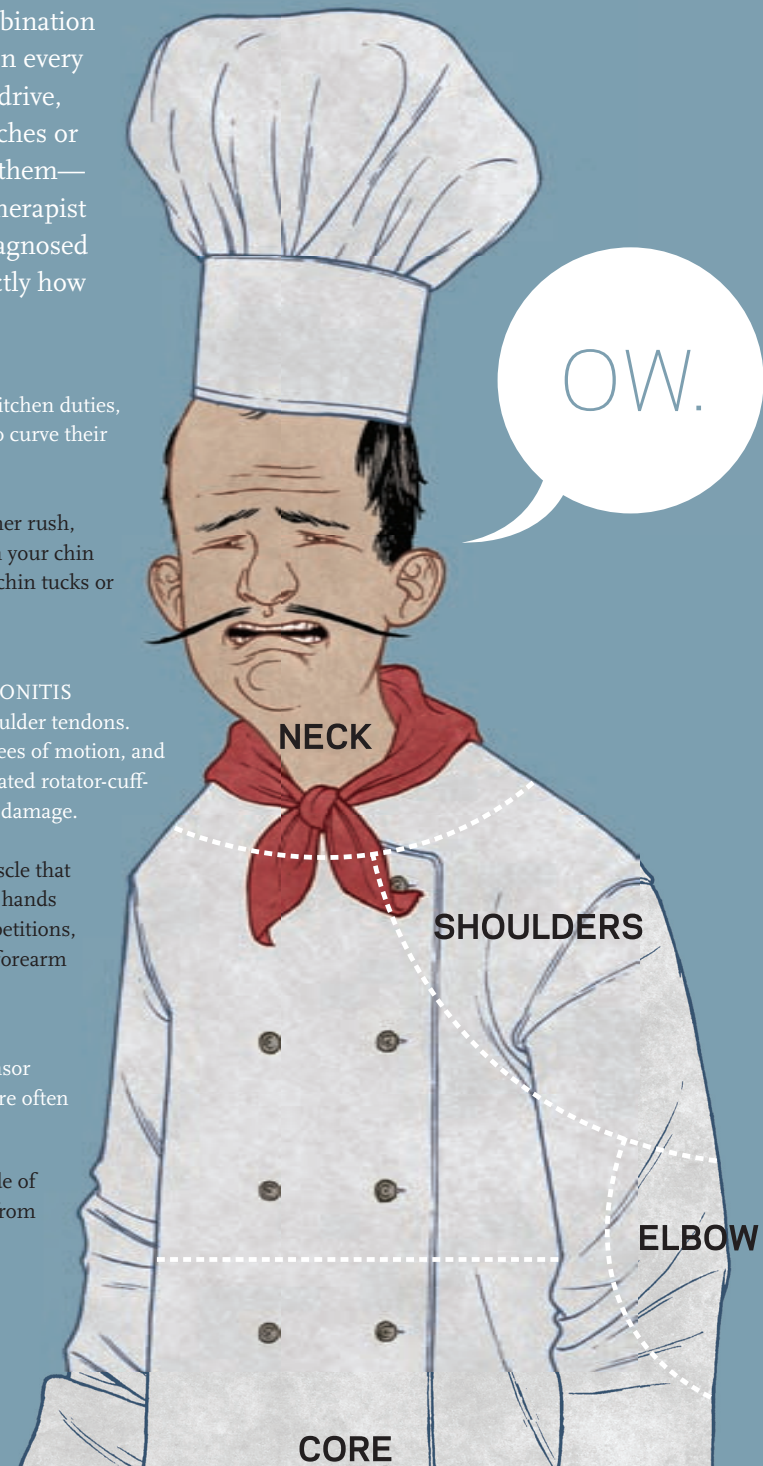
*Treatment:* Take breaks every hour, for ten to fifteen minutes at a time. (This can be virtually impossible during a dinner rush, but try anyway.) Bring your neck to a neutral state by looking straight ahead and moving your head straight back, with your chin tucked, or try gently bending the neck backward to reverse the forward-flexed curve. Aim for ten repetitions of either chin tucks or backward bends. These exercises should be woven into prep-list tasks during the day.

**SHOULDERS** SHOULDER IMPINGEMENT SYNDROME, OR ROTATOR-CUFF TENDONITIS ("SWIMMER'S SHOULDER"), is an irritation or inflammation of the shoulder tendons. The rotator-cuff muscle group includes four muscles responsible for arm elevation, especially in the first twenty degrees of motion, and for depression of the humeral head (found in the shoulder joint) when moving the arms above shoulder height. Repeated rotator-cuff-requiring actions, like lifting heavy pots or reaching up to high shelves, put chefs at risk of inflammation and muscle damage.

*Treatment:* The Full Can is an exercise that's great for strengthening the supraspinatus tendon—the small, meaty muscle that perches at the top of the shoulder. Stand and rotate your arms so that your thumbs are pointed upward, then lift your hands away from the body. (It should look like you're holding out a couple of open beer cans.) Do one to three sets of ten repetitions, two to three times a day. Alternately, you can do a doorway stretch: extend your arm at shoulder height and rest your forearm or hand against a wall. Turn your body away from the arm. Hold for thirty seconds and repeat.

**ELBOW** LATERAL EPICONDYLITIS, A.K.A. TENNIS ELBOW, is an inflammation of the wrist extensor muscles caused by repetitive gripping. Chopping, mixing, whisking, and lifting sauté pans are often the main culprits here. Tennis elbow can make performing these actions quite painful.

*Treatment:* Self-massage may be painful in this case, but it's also extremely beneficial. Find a tender spot on the outside of the forearm and try applying static pressure. You can also flick your thumb back and forth over the area, or massage from the wrist all the way through the deep tissue toward the elbow. Apply pressure that's painful, but not excruciating.



**THE WRIST** Chefs are prone to wrist injuries like CARPAL TUNNEL SYNDROME because of constant circular motions: whisking, swirling the contents of sauté pans, and reaching into massive mixing bowls.

*Treatment:* Stress balls really do work—they can help strengthen the wrist one squeeze at a time. And side towels aren't just for wiping countertops: roll up a clean towel and squeeze it for one to three seconds. Aim for ten repetitions.

**THE LOWER BACK** HERNIATED DISCS can occur as a result of a weakened lower back. (This begins with poor posture—that forward-flexed position.) Standing in a kitchen all day compresses the vertebrae, squeezing the intervertebral discs.

*Treatment:* McKenzie extensions can help to minimize pain and reduce disc herniations. Lie flat on your stomach, with your hands near your shoulders. Push your torso up, lifting head and shoulders in a cobra-like motion. Do not engage the butt muscles. Alternately, while standing, place your hands on your hips and gently bend backward until you feel a little compression in the lumbar spine. Try ten repetitions every hour. You can also avoid problems in this area by bending instead of crouching. If you're bending down to get something, squat at the hips and knees.

**HIPS** HIP PAIN. If your abs are weak, the hip muscles tighten down and work twice as hard. This is called an automatic compensatory adaptation, and in the long term, it can cause arthritis. This type of pain tends to afflict the average adult body around forty, but many chefs can begin to see these achy symptoms before then.

*Treatment:* Work your quads and glutes (along with the lower back and hamstrings) with exercises like leg lifts. Remember to keep your weight in the heels, your abs in, and your spine straight.

**KNEE** HYPEREXTENSION is the movement or extension of joints, muscles, or tendons beyond their normal range of motion. Standing all day with your knees locked causes the ligaments to become overstretched, forcing the knees to bow into an extreme backward bend.

*Treatment:* Change your shoes. The knees are fussy, and are easily affected by poor cushioning. Go Dutch, and opt for clogs as an external support system. Exercise-wise, do back squats: hold on to a countertop and bring your feet close together, then squat down into a ninety-degree angle. Return to where you started by pushing the hips up and forward. (Try for ten repetitions, and two to three sets.) You can also stretch your quads by pulling your heel to your backside, keeping your trunk upright and your core engaged (pulled in). Hold for thirty seconds, rest, and repeat.

**HEELS/FEET** PLANTAR FASCIITIS is the inflammation of the band of connective tissue on the underside of the foot. It can also transform into Achilles tendonitis, an inflammation of the tendon just above the heel.

*Treatment:* Heal the heels by exercising the toes. Place a side towel on a flat surface, then stand with one foot on the towel and try to gather it toward you with your toes. Then try to push it back out and flat. Repeat with the other foot. Or try heel raises: face a wall for support and raise the heels of both feet as high as you can. Hold at the top, slowly lower yourself down, and repeat. Ten repetitions, one to three sets. You can also treat this kind of pain by standing on a tennis or golf ball and rolling it back and forth under your foot.

