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## Holiday Baking, Back Pain, and Flare-Ups



Holiday preparations can cause strain and muscle soreness that can sideline us from fully enjoying the holiday itself. Most people do not think of baking as a fitness challenge, but taken to 6-batch cut-and-frosted Christmas Cookie level, it should be. The act of stirring and pouring heavy batters, beating eggs, lifting heavy bowls, trays, and pots, and bending in and out of a hot oven, not to mention cleaning it all up afterwards, and standing throughout, is a lot. It far exceeds the strength and stamina demands one might be asked to practice in an exercise session in physical therapy. And it often leaves bakers in pain that lasts longer than the holiday.

- Factors that have been found to correlate with back pain in food workers in research studies include:
  - ⇒ Work load
  - ⇒ Age
  - ⇒ Serratus anterior, lower trapezius, and erector spinae muscle strength
  - ⇒ Feeling of exertion
  - ⇒ Poor posture
  - ⇒ Counter height
  - ⇒ Stress and worry
- A **Flare-Up** is defined in a 2019 study as a “worsening of your condition that lasts from hours to weeks that is difficult to tolerate and generally impacts your usual activities and/or emotions.”
- Flare-ups are a normal reoccurrence for anyone with back pain history. Flare-ups wane over time and can be effectively managed with an exercise plan.
- Back pain is best managed addressing both physical and emotional factors.



(turn over)

## Before Baking

- Maintain a healthy exercise routine including strength and endurance activities like walking, running, or biking. The U.S. Health Dept. recommends at least 30 minutes per day for 5 days each week.
- Wear shoes with stable support, no-slip treads, and cushioning and arch support on the sole.
- Consider a gel mat for your kitchen 'standing spot'
- Plan for time off your feet during the baking process—make sure you are prepared to sit down while the cookies bake or as you decorate them. Schedule multiple batches over several days.



## During Baking

- Sit when you get the chance
- Pay attention to what your muscles are telling you—do you feel strain? Change your position or take a moment to stretch.
- Try resting one foot on a low stool or the cabinet edge
- Try the following stretches—they should feel good, not painful. Move in and out of them slowly and aim for a gentle 10 second hold, repeated 3 times.



Resting one foot on cabinet edge while working can help

Reach towards your toes while rounding your back (standing or sitting)



Stretch your back in a side arch (standing or sitting)



And include some rotation in that side bend for a gentle twist



## After Baking

- Plan time to rest your back and feet, but maintain light activities later in day
- Stretch out sore muscles periodically over the rest of the day.
- Have a cookie or two.
- If you have a back pain flare-up—Don't Panic! Rest and rebuild gently.
- For help, call IMGPT at (610) 944-8140.