



Keep the Kitchen Safe

The kitchen is one of the most hazardous places in the home. If you are being creative in your kitchen, be sure to be careful and follow some guidelines.

If you've never had a fire in your kitchen, you've been lucky. It's easy to start a fire by turning on the wrong burner, by leaving a dishtowel, potholder or recipe too close to the stove; or by being distracted from a project on the stove. Loose clothes, long sleeves and long hair may also be a hazard near the stove. How to respond to a fire may be to use your fire extinguisher or to throw baking soda into the fire, but turning off the gas or electricity might be a better first step. Do NOT put water on a stove or grease fire as it may splatter up and burn you. Be sure your children are trained to use the stove safely. Install a fire alarm near your kitchen. Be sure to turn off the stove and oven when you're finished using them. Get in the habit of asking.

Microwave cooking can also cause serious burns. Never turn on an empty oven. This can cause the microwave to break. Make sure you know how to set microwave oven controls. Read package directions carefully. Use only microwave-safe cookware. Never pop food from the microwave right into your mouth; it can be very hot. Allow the food to cool for a few minutes. This includes microwave popcorn. Open the bag with the opening away from you to keep from being burned by the steam. Use potholders to remove food from the microwave or stove to prevent burns.

Turn the handles of pots and pans away from the front so they aren't knocked off to spill and/or burn someone. Keep pots and pans in good shape. If handles or other parts become loose, be sure to secure them so they don't become detached as you lift a lid or a pan. Use a dry potholder or oven mitt when handling pots and pans. Wet potholder won't keep the heat from burning your fingers.

Put foods gently into boiling water to keep it from splashing and burning you. Lift the pot lids away from you, to avoid burning yourself with steam. If you are burned, quickly run cold water from the faucet over the burn.

Keep wet hands away from electrical outlets to avoid a nasty shock. Use electrical appliances safely. Keep them away from curtains or towels or anything that could catch fire. If toast gets stuck, unplug the toaster. Do not use any object to remove the toast.

Always pick up a knife by its handle, not its blade. When cutting, use a clean cutting board and cut away from you to avoid a cut.

Kitchens should be kept clean. This goes without saying. However, we often forget our freezers, refrigerators, stoves, ovens, microwaves, and cupboards, if we get busy and can close them. We forget they need to be cleaned at least annually. If they need to be cleaned more, then do it.

Refrigerators and freezers should be tested to be sure they are at a safe temperature and adjusted accordingly. Refrigerators should be at 33-40 degrees F, adjusting them so that lettuce doesn't freeze. Once refrigerated foods are cooled to less than 40°, cover them to avoid mixing odors. Review what's in your refrigerator weekly to discard old and spoiled foods.

Freezers should be at 0 degrees F or less. Use freezer containers or freezer bags to keep foods fresh and free of freezer burn. Use frozen foods within a year of placing them there for best quality.

Where does your water come from? If your answer is 'a well', be sure to have it tested at least annually. Commercial water from a well must be tested twice a year, by law. If there is a flood, fire, or other disaster, water should be tested even more often for potability (drinkability).

Keep medicines and cleaning supplies put away where small children can't become poisoned. Keep a poison-control phone number nearby in case of accidental poisoning: 800-222-1222.

Wash your hands with soap and water prior to eating or preparing food. Wash all fruits and vegetables before eating with clear clean water—no soap. In the event of a spill, be sure to properly clean it up to prevent unintended slips and falls.

It's important to think about these guidelines and use good common sense, when working in the kitchen. Share these guidelines with children and grandchildren, as well. After all, where is the first place children go upon arriving home from school?

Source: "Kitchen Safety Rules", Ag in the Classroom, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, 2002.

"Kitchen Safety for Children on their Own", A. Henneman, M.S., R.D., Extension Educator; and Nancy Malone, Grants Coordinator, Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department, 1995.