

Cooking Without Getting Zapped

by J. Camphill

Cooking meals is a challenge for those who are chemically and electrically sensitive. Having a gas range in the house is an absolute no-no, but the emissions from an electrical stove can be a problem too. Microwave ovens are even worse, and they tend to destroy the nutritional value of the food as well.

To get well, we need nutritious food and often have to work around food allergies, so cooking our own food is often essential. Fortunately, there are various ways to cope, such as:

- no-cook meals
- the simple three-step meal
- using a hot-plate with remote control
- cooking outside with propane
- using a solar cooker
- cooking with hydrogen

No-cook Meals

First of all, many meals can be prepared without heat, such as: sandwiches, fruits, blends of seeds, nuts and dried fruits, salads, granolas, raw vegetables (such as carrots), uncooked tofu, etc.

The Simple Three-step Meal

It is possible to cook a meal by only tending the pot three times, thus cutting down on exposures. Some can even be simmered from start to finish. By doing simple casseroles, one pot contains water, grain and vegetables, while a second pot has the meat in either oil or plain water. When the pots are filled, put them on the stove, turn it on high and walk away.

It may take 3 to 4 minutes for the pots to boil. Then step up and turn them down to where they will simmer. With practice, you'll know exactly where to set it. Then walk away again until it is done.

I used this cooking method for about two years, using a wind-up timer to help me remember to get back in time. With practice, I could time it perfectly. By basically only simmering the meal to finish, there was no need to stir anything, and I only had to be near the live stove three times.

Hot-plate With Remote Control

A better setup is to never go near the live hot-plate at all. This is easily done by remote control. When the food is ready to cook, step away and turn on the hot-plate. When you need to tend the food, turn it off before approaching and then on again when stepping away.

There are two ways to remotely control a hot plate: using a power strip and by using an air switch.

The power-strip can be placed rather close to the hot plate, or well away as needed. Simply get an extension cord to connect it to the hotplate and you can control it remotely. Some EMF does come from the extension cord and the power strip, of course, but it is less than the hot plate emits. The best extension cords are the heavy duty kinds that are round, as the internal wires inside the cable are twisted. This twist reduces the EMF emissions dramatically, compared to the flat type cables.

To be completely away from electrical wires, an air switch can be used. It is a switch that is controlled remotely by a little squeeze bulb that sends compressed air to the switch—no electricity involved in the user end. It is very simple to set up. The air switch is plugged into the electrical outlet and the cord to the hot plate is plugged into the switch. A small ¼ inch air hose is plugged into the switch and the squeeze bulb. It sets up in five minutes.

Press once on the bulb, and the switch turns on. Press again and the switch turns off.

The air switch and squeeze bulb cost about thirty dollars all together from Tecmark Corporation in Ohio (phone: 440-205-7600, web: www.tecmarkcorp.com). Their part numbers are: SAFPAC27 and PT7-3208.

I bought a 25-foot (1/4 inch size) air hose from a pet store that works very well. The pet store sells them for aquariums. Some folks use hoses for air tools, especially for longer distances and if they better tolerate those materials.

Cooking Outside With Propane

I shied away from using propane for years, assuming it would be terrible, but now I've happily been using it for almost two years, since I basically had to disconnect the power to the house.

It is essential to cook outside in a well-ventilated area. It does not work well to cook on a covered patio, unless right at the edge of it, and even that is not as good as fully in the open. It is best to cook up against a wall for protection against the wind, however.

Propane stoves are available from any place that sells camping equipment. If living in a windy area, make sure to get a model with high output burners, or the pots will not boil when it blows. I've cooked in 40 mph gusts with my 12,000 BTU burners, while friends with smaller burners had to give up in much smaller winds. Some people use propane barbecues to cook in, as the lid protects the pot from the elements.

There are stoves available for other fuels, but for daily use, propane is the only choice. The "white gas" Coleman fuel is essentially gasoline, and the small butane/propane canister stoves for backpacking are expensive to use.

Propane is available in 16oz throw-away steel cylinders, but for daily use a refillable five-gallon cylinder is much, much cheaper to use. Just get a small adapter at a hardware store when buying the cylinder. Camping stores are way overpriced on cylinders compared to a hardware store.

Gas cylinders can be refilled at many small-town gas stations, private camp grounds, and country stores. In larger towns look for the local propane supplier. Some large stores, like Wal-Mart and Home Depot, have a service where they simply exchange the cylinder for one already filled, but that convenience doubles the price.

The cylinder may smell of gas a little after it has been filled, from when they finished filling the tank and some was spilled. It is actually the fragrance added to propane that is noticeable. The smell goes away after a couple of hours. Doing the tank exchange avoids this problem.

Solar Cookers

Solar cookers can be used a good part of the year, depending on the climate. They can be home made or bought, as simple as a cardboard box with a glass top, or much more sophisticated. Some people have even built them into the south facade of their homes so they can access them inside for ultimate convenience.

Of course, a solar cooker only works when the sun is shining, so it is not a complete solution in itself. I have not tried it yet myself. I liked the book "Cooking With The Sun" by Beth Halacy and Dan Halacy. One discount vendor of solar cookers is Kansas Wind Power (phone: 785-364-4407, web:

www.KansasWindPower.net). Web sites with articles: www.solarcooking.org, www.homepower.com.

Cooking With Hydrogen

Hydrogen is a clean-burning gas that may be tolerable for even indoor cooking. Since hydrogen is completely carbon-less, no soot or other combustion products are generated other than water vapors, and hot-metal fumes from the stove itself.

Hydrogen can be purchased from welding supply companies, though it is much more expensive than propane gas. The other problem is that special hydrogen burners are required—it will not work with propane burners, or natural gas burners. Special hydrogen equipment is hard to find. One source is the Fuel Cell Store (www.fuelcellstore.com). It is also possible to modify propane equipment.

For more information, see the article “Cookin’ on Hydrogen” in issue 33 of Home Power magazine (www.homepower.com, 1-800-707-6585, PO Box 520, Ashland OR 97520). Their web site has several articles about hydrogen.

I have not actually tried hydrogen equipment. One friend tested it, and didn’t find it good enough for indoor cooking, while I’ve heard of others who do O.K. with it.