

How to avoid cooking fumes and odors



Cooking odors are a common problem for pregnant women and people with chemical sensitivities. We show several ways people have solved this problem.

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Cooking food puts fumes and aerosols into the air in the kitchen, especially if cooking at high heat and if the food gets burnt. This can irritate the sinuses of highly sensitive people. People have solved this problem in several ways by either changing what they cook, how they cook or where they cook.

Choice of foods

Notice if there are certain foods that bother you more than others. Then try to avoid them. It takes a long time to boil cabbage, cauliflower and broccoli, and their smells can be bothersome.

Low-heat cooking

Frying food at high heat on a pan puts out much more smoke and odors than a casserole. Casseroles are the way to go for low-impact cooking.

If you still want to cook with a frying pan, it can be done at a lower setting and using water instead of oil (or a little oil added to the water). The meat won't have the same satisfying crispness though.

Cooking a casserole at a lower setting further reduces the odors. It takes longer to cook, but it dramatically reduces the fumes and the chance the food may get burnt. And it also preserves the nutrients better. Low-heat cooking in a pot may add ten or fifteen minutes to the cooking time, that's all (okay, we know that seems a lot to some people).

If you cook at a low heat, you don't need to watch the pot so closely. That means you can leave the kitchen and its odors for most of the cooking time.

Crock pots

Crock pots are an easy way to cook food with minimal fumes. Two of them works great: one crock pot can cook rice, while the other cooks meat and vegetables, for instance.

Crock pots can also be used to heat canned foods.

This is slower than low-heat cooking on the stove, so you need to be more organized to set it up in time.

Microwave

A microwave heats the inside of the food, so there is less chance of burning the edges. And it goes faster too. Overall, microwaving food generates less odors.

Use glass pots

If you use a glass pot, you don't need to open the lid to check on the food. It may even allow you to check on the food from a distance, looking through a glass door.



A glass pot over low heat can dramatically reduce your exposure to cooking fumes.

Distract your nose

It may help if you chew on something while cooking, such as chewing gum or a menthol candy, etc.

Staying away

With experience and timing, it is possible to cook with just three visits to the kitchen.

First visit is the initial food preparation and starting the stove on a somewhat high setting.

Second visit, about ten minutes later, is to turn down the stove to a simmer.

Third visit is turning the stove off and removing the food to eat in another room.

Isolating the kitchen

If you live in a house or apartment where the kitchen is a part of the living room, it may be possible to install a glass patio door or similar to keep the cooking odors away from the rest of the home.

Encapsulating the stove

Another option is to encapsulate the stove. We have only seen this done twice, where a large box was built around the entire stove as shown in the picture.



Encapsulated full-size stove with oven

This was a major project. An article detailing how it was done is available through the link at the end of this article.

It may be simpler to buy a ventilated hood system intended for laboratories. A portable hot plate or a toaster should be able to fit into a smaller one of those. The exhaust could be connected through an existing stove hood, or through a window that is closed down on a sheet of aluminum plate with an aluminum dryer hose going to it.

It should be possible to custom build a box around a portable hot plate. We suggest using a combination of glass panels, anodized aluminum plates, and aluminum dryer vent hose. But we haven't seen anyone actually do such a project.

Outdoor cooking

Cooking outdoors eliminates smoke and odors in the house. It can be done using an electric hotplate or a gas camping stove.

Some people with both severe chemical and electrical sensitivities cook outdoors with gas. If you are careful, cooking with gas is safe even for people with severe MCS. The main issue is to hold your breath while lighting the flame.

Cooking outside can be done in nearly all climates and all seasons, though there may be times when severe weather makes cooking outside unrealistic for a day.

In dry climates an open porch works well. In wetter climates it is best to use a covered porch. A more enclosed porch may not work with a gas stove.

A propane stove can work fine while it rains softly on it, but if the burners are wet they are hard to light, so keep a lid on them when not in use.



Outdoor cooking on an open porch in warm climates with little wind.



A better cooking setup built of stacked concrete blocks and up against a wall that protects against the prevailing wind direction.

Electrical hot plates should not be used when wet, due to possible electrical shorts.

The wind can cause so much heat loss in the cold season that the pot will never boil. This is especially a problem with electrical hot plates as they do not put out as much heat as a gas stove.

You may need to set up a wind breaker of some sort. It can be very simple, such as some bricks arranged around the stove on top of a table.

More information

A project to encapsulate a stove:

www.eiwellspring.org/ehs/GasStoveEnclosure.htm

Many more articles on how to cope with environmental sensitivities at

www.eiwellspring.org