



Teens in the kitchen

Watch what you're cooking. Never leave food unattended while cooking. Stay by the stove when cooking, broiling or frying food. Remain focused and limit distractions. If you need to leave the room, even for a second, turn off the stove.

Keep pots on the back burner. Teach teens to use the back burners on the stove and make a habit of turning pot handles inward on the stovetop and away from the edge of the stove.

Establish a 3-foot safety zone. Keep items that burn, such as dishtowels, paper or plastic bags, and curtains at least 3 feet away from the range top so they won't catch fire. Do not hang them on the handle of the stove.

Mind the microwave. Always use hot pads to carefully remove hot items from the microwave or oven. Do not allow preteens to use a microwave until they are tall enough to reach in it safely. Stir microwave-prepared food to prevent hot spots. Know that hot liquids and steam can cause serious scalding burns. Water heated to 150 degrees can cause a third-degree burn in just two seconds.

Eat at the table or on a hard surface. While it may be tempting for kids to eat their dinner on the couch in front of the TV, make it a rule to eat at the table or on a hard surface. A surprising number of burns are caused when people spill hot food while trying to balance it on their lap.

Check your home for safety. Install smoke alarms on every floor of the home, including one near the kitchen. Test them regularly. Teach teens to never disable a smoke alarm. Keep a fire extinguisher in the kitchen and make sure everyone in the family knows how to use it.

Cooking is the No. 1 cause of home fires in the United States. As teens become more independent — preparing their own meals when home alone after school and taking on some family cooking responsibilities — it's important for them to understand the risks and to know how to cook safely.

Having a conversation to ensure they really know and understand the risks and responsibilities of cooking based upon their maturity and comfort level is key. Establishing clear expectations and rules for teens regarding cooking in the home is also important.

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