

Cooking Oil and Grease Fires



Pay attention

Cooking oil and grease fires are a major cause of fires and fatalities. Kitchen fires triggered by cooking oil or grease cause the fastest-spreading destruction of any kind of fire. A pot of cooking oil placed on a stove burner at high heat is a sure-fire recipe for danger. It's important to pay attention. Cooking late at night poses the greatest risk because there is a chance you could fall asleep, especially if you have been drinking. In only a few minutes, oil can overheat and the vapours burst into flames. Many people are killed or seriously burned in kitchen fires that start this way. Whatever method you choose for cooking, there are ways to greatly reduce the risk of fire. Never leave what you are doing unattended or allow yourself to be distracted.

Deep frying

- Never heat oil or shortening for deep frying in a pot on top of a burner.
- Use only a thermostatically-controlled deep fat fryer which is properly designed for safe cooking with oil.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for care and cleaning. The Office of the Fire Marshal and your local fire department urge you to use ONLY thermostatically controlled deep fat fryers.

Pan frying

- The safest way to pan fry if you're using oil is in a thermostatically-controlled electric skillet. Use only enough oil to cover the bottom of the pan.
- If you're using a frying pan on a burner, it is safer to apply a non-stick spray rather than a layer of oil on the pan's surface.
- When using a gas stove, adjust the burner to avoid flare-ups around the pan.
- When using a pan or wok for stir frying, preheat the pan before adding oil. The pan is ready if a teaspoon of water skitters or dances across its surface.

Oven cooking

- Keep your oven clean. Grease and food splatters can ignite at high temperatures, causing an oven fire.
- Follow the oven cooking instructions for the recipe or product you are using.

- Broiling is a popular method of cooking. When you use your broiler, place the rack 50 to 80 millimetres (two to three inches) from the broiler element. Always place a pan beneath the broiler rack to catch the fat drippings. Never use aluminum foil for this purpose — the fat gathered in the foil could catch fire.

Other kitchen safety hints

- Keep the area around your stove free from items that could catch fire easily - paper towels, pot holders, curtains and dish cloths, for instance.
- Keep your stove top and fan unit clean.
- Loose clothing is a serious burn hazard when you're working around your stove.
- Never leave food cooking on the stove unattended.
- Keep a charged fire extinguisher handy. Contact your local fire department for instructions on its proper placement and operation. Work out an escape plan with your family and practise it regularly.
- Never use a stove as a heating appliance.

What to do in an emergency

Oven fires

- Turn off the heat.
- Close the oven door and keep it closed.
- Only use a fire extinguisher if you have the proper one for the job and you know how to use it.

Cooking oil fires

- Never use water to extinguish a cooking oil fire — it will make the fire flare and spread.
- Put a tight-fitting lid on the pot or slide a cookie sheet over it to smother the flames.
- Turn off the overhead fan to keep the flames from spreading.
- Don't remove the pot from the stove. The flaming oil will slosh and spill, burning you or spreading the fire.
- Never pour burning oil down the sink. If the fire doesn't go out right away, leave the house and call the fire department from a neighbour's house.