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Safety in the kitchen

Forty per cent of all the accidents in the home happen in the kitchen. Children under 5 years, and elderly people over 65, are most at risk.

Bad design and faulty maintenance are responsible for some of the risks, but most accidents are due to personal factors such as worry, temper, fatigue, haste and depression in adults, and curiosity and disobedience in children.

The kitchen should have a first aid box or cabinet which should be lockable or kept well out of reach of small children.

Planning

The safest layouts are those where the cooker, work surface and sink are in an unbroken sequence, uninterrupted by doorways. This avoids carrying hot dishes and boiling pans across circulation spaces.

Never position cookers near a window where draughts can extinguish gas flames and where curtains or blinds might catch fire.

Check that fan casings and cooker hoods are positioned according to the manufacturers' recommendations, which must be well above a hob or a high level gas grill. See p. 118.

Drying racks should never be placed over cookers as towels may fall down and catch fire.

All appliances and sinks should be kept well away from inward opening doors, which may bang into the person using them.

A worktop area should be provided both sides of a cooker and should be level with the hob surround. Pan handles should always be parked sideways, out of the reach of small children.

Climbing up on rickety chairs to reach things accounts for many accidents, particularly amongst the elderly who should be provided with a small stepladder or a *kick-step*.

Good lighting of working areas is essential to prevent cuts, burns, scalds and fingers being trapped in moving parts.

Floors must be level, with no steps or raised thresholds, and the finish should be non-slip. Avoid wax polishes which can be slippery when wet. Water, and particularly grease and oil spills, should be mopped up as soon as they occur.

Lack of storage will result in things being left on the floor – such as shopping bags over which people can trip.

Children

Young children should not be allowed to play in the kitchen where their mother can trip over their toys while she is handling boiling pans or sharp knives. Cooks' knives are best hung on magnetic racks rather than drawers which can be accessible to young fingers.

Toddlers must also be prevented from eating and drinking pets' food and water, and putting polythene bags over their heads which can cause swift suffocation.

Bleach, and other household poisons, should be stored in cupboards above worktop level so as to be out of children's reach.

Electrical appliances – safety aspects

A kitchen must be provided with at least four socket outlets above the worktop to cope with small electrical appliances