

Avoid Garbage Disposal Problems

The most common plumbing breakdown during the holidays is blamed on the garbage disposer. This is partly because when the drain line serving the kitchen sink is clogged, it backs up through the garbage disposer. In very few cases a worn out garbage disposer is to blame. More often, the user has caused the problem.

Proper Use: Garbage disposers, and the drain lines to which they're connected, are not intended for use in disposing of fat, grease, large hard (T) bones and extremely fibrous materials like cornhusk silks and artichokes. These items have a tendency to plug up the drain line causing it to back up and create a stinky mess in your kitchen sink.

Place fat and grease into cans or bottles for disposal through your solid waste trash. Place T bones and other large bones into a plastic zip lock type of bag and dispose of through normal household trash. If you have a compost heap, consider recycling cornhusks, artichokes and other fibrous wastes there, or again, throw them out with your regular trash.

Run plenty of COLD water while you are using the disposer to eliminate food wastes. If you are using it to eliminate a substantial amount of food waste (1 pound or greater), when you've completed using the disposer, turn it off and plug the drain for the sink. Fill the sink with cold water to approximately 1/4 of its depth. Pull the drain plug out and turn the disposer on. This should thoroughly wash the drain line free of any garbage that might cause a partial stoppage, which could eventually lead to a complete stoppage. Although it is tempting to use hot water during the operation of the disposer, this will almost definitely cause a stoppage further down stream. Using cold water helps to keep grease and fat in a solid form where it can move down the drain line, and not coat the line over a period of time, which would eventually cause it to become blocked.

A list of DOs

- Do turn on a medium to strong cold-water flow before you start using the appliance. Continue running the cold water for approximately 15 seconds after grinding has ceased, to flush the drain line and the disposer free of food particles.
- Do occasionally put a small amount of ice into the disposer to help clean the inside of the grinding area. Use caution when doing this and make sure you have the drain stopper in place to avoid flying particles that could be ejected from the disposer's grinding chamber.
- Do occasionally use a disposer cleaner degreaser to help eliminate grease that may cause unpleasant odors. Check to make sure that the product is authorized by the disposer manufacturer.

- Do consider having your kitchen drain line snaked approximately every two years as preventive maintenance. The disposer is only as good as the drain line serving it.
- Do ask your plumbing professional for advice on the best methods to maintain your drains and to help keep them clean and flowing freely.
- Every once in a while, grind up peels from citrus fruits like lemons or oranges. This helps keep the grinding area smelling fresh and the natural acidity help suppress bacterial growth associated with odors.

A List of **DON'Ts**

- Don't use hot water while grinding food. It is perfectly acceptable to run hot water down the drain after you've used the disposer, but it is important that only cold water be used during the food grinding process.
- Don't put grease, fat or fibrous waste into the disposer. It will cause the drain line to become plugged. Dispose of it as previously described through the solid waste channels available to you.
- Don't fill the grinding chamber full of vegetable peels and then turn it on and expect it to handle the load. Keep the cuttings in a separate container and feed them slowly into the grinder while feeding plenty of cold water at the same time.
- Don't use harsh drain cleaning chemicals, as they are potentially harmful to the user, the plumbing system and the environment. If you have used strong drain line cleaners, be sure and tell this to the drain cleaning technician so that he can take appropriate precautions.

If your food waste disposer is over seven years old, it might be advantageous to consider having it replaced. Contact your PHCC contractor to discuss the possibility of installing a new one. The money it saves in plugged drain bills may well be worth it.