



Pressure Cookers/Steamers Safety

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A 5-Minute Safety Training Aid

Many dietary and food service employees use pressure cookers and/or steamers to cook food. Pressure cookers use the buildup of steam to raise the temperature inside their pot to cook food in a shorter amount of time. The new pressure cookers are a lot safer than older models. The steam produced by pressure cookers can be very dangerous. The most dangerous steam associated with pressure cookers is invisible water vapor that is above the boiling point of water and can be highly pressurized and moving very fast as it escapes its confinement. This steam can cause painful and serious burns.

The most important thing to know about using a pressure cooker or steamer is to follow the manufacturer's instructions for operation and maintenance. Be careful to follow instructions about attaching the lid securely, quickly reducing steam pressure, and opening the pot when cooking is completed. The rubber gasket seal and the steam vent tube are the critical parts of this appliance; make sure that the gaskets are solid, clean, not ripped or torn; and that the vent tube is clean and clear, not clogged with food. Use the cleaning implement that comes with the pressure cooker or a pipe cleaner to keep that vent tube clear.

If using an old-fashioned pressure cooker (older than 5 years), for quick release, the steam has to be released by placing the cooker in the sink and running cold water over it. (Make sure to keep the water out of the steam valve!) This reduces the temperature and therefore reduces the steam pressure. Let the cooker cool down naturally until the pressure is released; this takes anywhere from 10-30 minutes.

Pressure Cooker Critical Tips

- Be sure that the lid is properly closed and locked into position before allowing pressure to build.
- If steam is escaping from the pressure cooker handles or around the rim, shut the heat off, allow the pressure cooker to cool down, then rinse off the lid and return the lid to the pot. Tighten the lid back down and try to bring the pressure up again. If the steam continues to leak from the handles or lid, shut it back off, let it cool down again and check the rubber seal around the rim.

The pressure cooker may need to have a new seal.

- Check the handles to see if they are loose, if so, tighten them up. In any case cooking with the steam escaping could be dangerous and the food inside will surely burn before cooking.



How do I know when the pressure cooker is cooking correctly?

- Recipes should tell you how many pounds of pressure to cook with. This also can be determined by listening to the jingle of the pressure gauge. If the heat is too low, it will NOT keep a steady jingle noise, if the heat is too high it will whistle with steam and have an uneven out of control rattle noise, which is a dangerous situation as the pressure cooker could explode, the lid blow off and cause injury!

How do I determine when it is safe to remove the gauge and lid?

- This can be determined by looking at the pressure gauge to see that it has stopped making noise and releasing steam and that it appears to be setting completely still. Look at the small rubber vent; it should have dropped even to the lid. This takes about 15 minutes.
- To be safe, after the waiting period, gently move the pressure cooker to the sink and slowly run a little tap water into the sink around the bottom of the pressure cooker. If there is no steam sound, shut the water off and use a 2-prong turning fork with a long handle to gently stick under the pressure gauge, lifting the gauge just slightly.
- Keep your face back away from the pressure cooker itself. If there is no steam, it should be safe to remove the gauge, using caution at all times.
- Allow the pressure cooker to sit a few minutes without the gauge before removing the lid. Use potholders to remove the lid to be on the safe side.

***Additional Safety Tips
for Operating a Steamer:***

- Shut off the steam supply and wait for about two minutes before moving the pan.
- Release the pressure by operating the opening gear slightly and pause again.
- Before opening the steamer door, make sure that there is no one around the steamer.
- Stand to the side and open the lid keeping the lid between you and the open steamer.
- Remove items carefully using oven mitt and place on a trolley. Carrying steamer trays across the kitchen will leave a trail of dripping hot water.
- When steamers are stacked, open the top one first and then the lower one to prevent burning from rising steam.
- Do not exceed manufacturer's recommended limits for the steamer.
- Do not open the lid when the steam supply is open.

Remember to practice safety. Don't learn it by accident.