

How sanitary is your kitchen?

Tips on keeping pests out of food prep areas—and away from residents

Preparing three meals a day for your residents is a demanding task. It's no surprise, then, that your nursing home's kitchen is a busy place, as cooks and staff travel in and out to prepare and retrieve these meals. Unfortunately, the kitchen can also be a busy place for flies, cockroaches, and other pests looking for food, water, and shelter.

Flies are some of the filthiest insects around. They can carry more than 100 known pathogens, including common sources of foodborne illness such as *E. coli*, *Salmonella*, and *Staphylococcus*. Cockroaches also pose a threat to food safety. They can carry disease-causing organisms that can result in several intestinal diseases, including dysentery, typhoid fever, and cholera.

Given the pathogens that flies and cockroaches carry, even an occasional sighting of the pests is grounds for action. Yet by focusing on sanitation, managers can help make their facilities' kitchens less inviting to unwanted invaders in the first place.

Pest control specialists typically employ an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) system to improve overall sanitation. This approach stresses the use of nonchemical methods before turning to pesticides. You can apply some of these steps yourself:

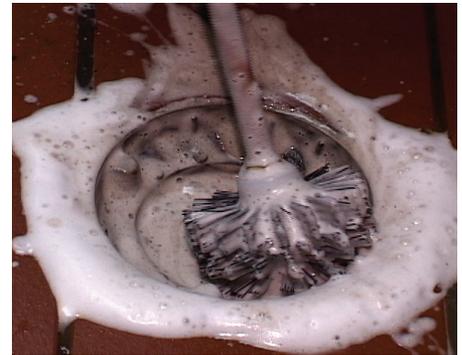
- Clean the floor immediately after a food or liquid spill. Food and drink spills are beacons for pests.
- Inspect the area around drains, sinks, soda machines, and other appliances for standing water. Many pests need only a small amount of water to survive, so if you find a leaky appliance, report the problem immediately to your maintenance professional.
- Consider using an organic drain cleaner in sinks and food preparation areas. Organic cleaners effectively remove grease runoff and other debris that can sustain fruit and drain flies.

- Vacuum all cracks and crevices to remove residual food debris. Vacuums equipped with HEPA (high efficiency particulate air) filters are especially effective at removing allergens associated with pests.
- Keep storage areas clean and dry. Flies and cockroaches can become a problem with only a few crumbs of food left in the open. Open-backed shelves are the best, as they are the easiest to take apart and wash.
- Reduce odors from trash receptacles, since trash odors are powerful pest attractants. Line trash cans and make sure they are tightly sealed. Remove and dispose of trash regularly. Keep dumpsters as far away from the building as possible, and clean and rotate them frequently.

Taking just a few extra steps can help tremendously when it comes to pest prevention, but everyone needs to participate for sanitation to be effective. Make sure your employees understand the key role they play in the overall cleanliness of the facility, and review sanitation measures with them on a regular basis.

For advice on a more comprehensive sanitation program, contact your local pest management professional for a free consultation. Adhering to these guidelines will go a long way in keeping your kitchen—and your residents—safe from pests. ■

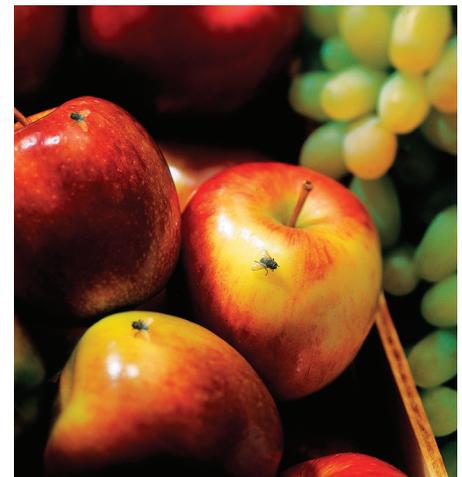
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Use an organic drain cleaner in food prep areas.



Line trash cans and make sure they are tightly sealed.



Flies and cockroaches can become a problem when food is left in the open.