

How to Survive a Kitchen Remodel



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Washing mugs in the tub and getting hooked on Pop-Tarts — here's what to expect if you stay at home during construction

Home remodeling pros and those who have been through a [kitchen remodel](#) agree that the best way to get through it is to flee and stay somewhere else. But this option is not always viable, so here is what to expect if you have to live in your house through a remodel and how to prepare for it.



This story was inspired by this kitchen

Be Fully Aware of What's Going to Happen

It's going to be messy. It's going to be noisy. For about a full 2 weeks, you're going to walk into a gutted kitchen expecting to turn on the coffee maker and then realize that you are barefoot in a construction zone. (It's OK; it happens to the best of us.)

How to Survive a Kitchen Remodel

There will likely be frustrating delays and unexpected changes during the process. Unable to fix anything else for breakfast, you may get addicted to Pop-Tarts. You will find yourself rinsing a dish in a small powder room sink or a bathtub. You won't be able to imagine wanting to dine at a restaurant again, and you're going to feel the hit of all that dining out on your wallet.

Concentrate on letting go of control because if you try to hold on to it, you're toast. This would be a good time to take up yoga or learn to meditate. In addition to helping you find a calm place mentally, it's a great excuse to get out of the house. Find some good classes or apps and head to the park.



Make Preparations and Get Organized

Plan to do the following before demolition begins:

How to Survive a Kitchen Remodel

- **Carve out time to pack up the kitchen properly** or arrange for movers or help, since it's a big task.
- **Think about whether some sort of refrigeration will be possible.** Perhaps there's an old fridge in the garage you use for beer or a minifridge elsewhere in the house. It's worth renting a small one or buying one secondhand. Just be sure there is a place you can plug it in outside the kitchen.
- **Include takeout food and restaurant expenses** in your overall renovation budget.
- **Change your attitude.** Tell yourself and anyone who usually listens to you vent that you're adopting a chic, healthy European lifestyle that involves stopping by the market every day for that night's supper provisions. Note that these shopping trips will require some time management, but on the plus side, they will get you out of the construction zone.

Set Up a Makeshift Kitchenette

If possible, set up a mini kitchen in another room. Think about what equipment might come in handy for throwing together meals. Suggestions include:

- Coffee maker
- Electric teakettle
- Toaster or toaster oven
- Slow cooker
- Portable electric grill
- Electric frying pan (if you have a place to clean it)
- Minifridge

Find portable kitchen appliances

If your house has a mini kitchen or a wet bar elsewhere, you're in luck. This is a great spot to set up.

For the rest of us, it's more of a challenge. The mini kitchen can go just about anywhere in your house, but cleanup is the catch. So think about how you're going to handle a small-appliance cooking mess before you make it — this may involve the patio, a hose and a dishwashing tub.

How to Survive a Kitchen Remodel

I didn't include measuring cups or mixing bowls among the things to leave out of the packing boxes (see below) because making pancakes or anything else that requires them is not an easily cleaned-up meal — rinsing out a batter bowl in the small sink in your lovely master bathroom is a bad idea.

Menu Plan

Now that you know batter and other messy stuff is a no-go, get used to the reality of your new at-home menu. It will consist mostly of food you can toast indoors or grill outdoors, as well as soup, cereal and cold sandwiches. "You're going to want to buy stuff at the grocery store that you can stick a spoon in," says Dan Harris, who is living through a kitchen renovation and is my father.

Clean Up Immediately

Keep dish detergent, a scrub brush and a dish towel at the sink you've designated as your cleanup site. The designated food trash can should have a lid to contain odors and keep pests away. Scrape dishes into the trash, wash them, dry them and put them back in their designated spots.



How to Survive a Kitchen Remodel

Make a List of Things to Leave Out

Figuring out what not to pack is key because once you box up your stuff, you won't be able to find anything you need until after the kitchen is completed and the boxes are unpacked.

Suggestions from folks who have been through this recently:

- Grilling tools
- Carving knife, bread knife, paring knife
- Cutting board
- Two or three platters
- Coffee, tea, sweeteners, a few coffee mugs and teacups
- Paper plates and napkins
- A set of silverware and a dish-and-glass place setting for everyone in the household
- Liquid detergent, scrub brush, dishwashing tub, dish towels
- Salt, pepper, favorite spices
- Foil, plastic wrap, a storage container or two
- A few serving spoons
- Can opener, bottle opener, wine opener
- Koozies
- Pet food and bowls
- Place mats and a tablecloth
- Large tray for carrying food from wherever it is prepared to wherever it will be served

A Word About Paper and Plastic

A lot of people go strictly paper and plastic for dishes and silverware, and if that's what you need to do to get by, there's no judgment here. But it's bad for the environment, it's expensive, and it gets old. You will need only one plate, bowl, mug, glass, fork, spoon, knife and place mat for each family member because without a kitchen, cleanup will be immediate.

And no extras are required; please know that no one else wants to be a dinner guest at a house undergoing a kitchen renovation. It's like the *Seinfeld* episode in which Kramer revealed that he had prepared all the food in the shower.

How to Survive a Kitchen Remodel

Keep Paring Down

While packing up the kitchen, keep a donation bin nearby. As you touch each item, ask yourself if it is worth packing, storing, unpacking and then finding space for in the beautiful new kitchen. When was the last time you used it? Does it, as Marie Kondo asks, spark joy? Where are you going to put it in the new kitchen? Can you imagine yourself using it in the new kitchen? The answers to these questions will let you know if you should wrap it up and pack it or pass it along to someone who needs it.



Designate a Room as a Construction-Free Zone

In the film *Under the Tuscan Sun*, Frances Mayes' advice for surviving a renovation is to "pick one room and make it yours." This concept is key to reno survival.

Designate one room as your sanity-saving space and be very clear with the contractor that it is off-limits for cutting through and for storing tools, supplies and the things that have come out of the kitchen.

The best options are rooms that are not bedrooms and not directly adjacent to or above the kitchen. Workers will want to spread into the closest spaces when they need to stash the new cabinets or boxes of tile, so if the room is kitchen-adjacent, be vigilant because it will be a slippery slope. One day, it's one box of tile being stored there; the next day, it's four major appliances.

How to Survive a Kitchen Remodel



Set Up a Table for Eating

Whether you'll be eating takeout, using the grill or becoming an expert with the slow cooker, eating off TV trays from the sofa or picnicking on the living room floor will get old pretty fast. Some use their screened-in porches or patios during nice weather; others set up a card table or a drop-leaf table with a pretty tablecloth. Wherever it is, be vigilant about cleaning up crumbs after meals.

