

Sinks

A clog, low water pressure—a nonfunctioning sink can practically shut down a kitchen. It's good to know that minor repairs can get your sink up and running in no time.

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Faucet Aerator Maintenance

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Tongue-and-groove pliers (with taped jaws so as not to mar the faucet finish)

Penetrating oil*

Old toothbrush

* If applicable



Is the water flow at your faucet so low that it takes 10 minutes to rinse one dish? The lack of pressurized flow is probably due to a clogged aerator. The *aerator* is a small filtering device at the tip of your faucet. It contains one or more screens that serve two functions—filtering out particles and creating a smooth, neat flow of water.

Over time, these screens become clogged, which causes the water to lose pressure as it flows out of the faucet. The particles clogging the screens may also cause the spout to sputter. Simply cleaning the screens will get that full flow going again.

CONSIDER THIS

- Whenever you take something apart, be sure to remember what order the parts go in. In this instance, place the aerator parts down one at a time and in order from left to right, as if you're creating an exploded view of the aerator and all its parts. Then work in reverse when putting it back together.
- Some aerators are flush within a wider nozzle, making them less obvious to locate and remove. Look for flat ridges on the aerator where you'll grip the pliers.
- You may find various types of aerators to replace your existing one that offer special features like an on/off lever and directional sprayer. Low-flow replacement aerators are also a great choice to reduce water consumption (see the "High-Efficiency Aerators" sidebar on page 18).

PREP WORK

- Close the drain so you don't lose any parts.
- If the faucet is old or you see mineral deposits around the aerator, spray the aerator with penetrating oil and let it soak in for about 15 minutes to make the unscrewing easier.

THE PROJECT

- 1 With the pliers, unscrew the aerator.
- 2 Brush out the screen with an old toothbrush. Depending on the aerator you have, there may be more than one screen with accompanying rings. Carefully pull them apart and brush out the particles.
- 3 Run the water without the aerator in place. You may be surprised at what comes out and how the water goes chug-a-lug without the aerator in place.
- 4 Reassemble the aerator and screw it back to the faucet. Snug it tight with the pliers.

High-Efficiency Aerators

Rinsing dishes, filling containers, running the food disposal, scrubbing pans—the kitchen faucet is one of the most frequently used fixtures in a house. So why not use an aerator that can reduce water consumption, conserve energy, and help save money on your water bill, all without jeopardizing “rinsability”?

High-efficiency aerators are low flow (they use fewer gallons per minute than standard aerators), but because of their design, they provide steady, powerful pressure. Some, like the Neoperl, are also designed to resist lime buildup, which will obstruct your stream. If you regularly fill the sink to wash dishes or fill large pots for cooking, look for an aerator that enables you to flip between high- and low-flow functions when speed is an issue.

When choosing a high-efficiency aerator, look for water-saving certifications like the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) WaterSense label, and then verify that the fit is compatible with your faucet type.



Tighten a Loose Faucet

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Basin wrench or tongue-and-groove pliers

Installation tool*

Penetrating oil*

Flashlight

Old pillow or blanket

Rubber washers*

* If applicable

Aggressive wear and tear on a kitchen faucet can cause the faucet to loosen and end up wiggling around the sink or countertop. This problem must be corrected to prevent future damage to the faucet and to stop water from dripping under it and into your cabinet. What's happening is that the nuts of the faucet under the sink have loosened and are no longer securing it snugly to the sink or countertop. Snugging this connection back down is a quick-and-easy fix.

CONSIDER THIS

To keep your faucet from loosening in the future, it's important not to jar or tug on the handles or spout—as when kids use the spout like a grab handle to help hoist themselves up high enough to reach the sink. Aggressive wear and tear may lead to a more serious problem that won't be easily fixed with a simple project like this one.

PREP WORK

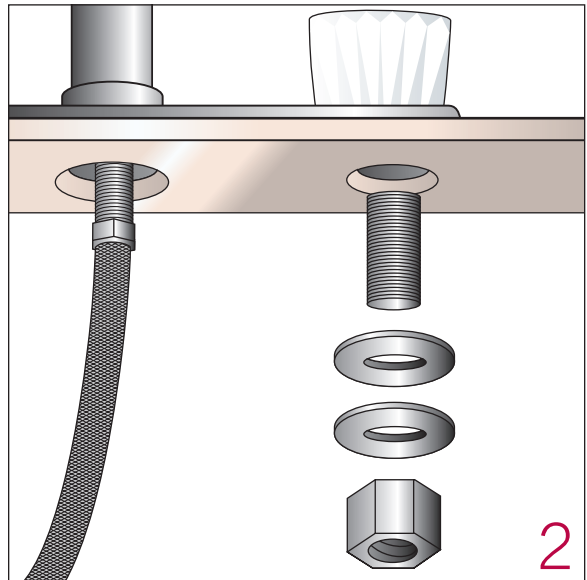
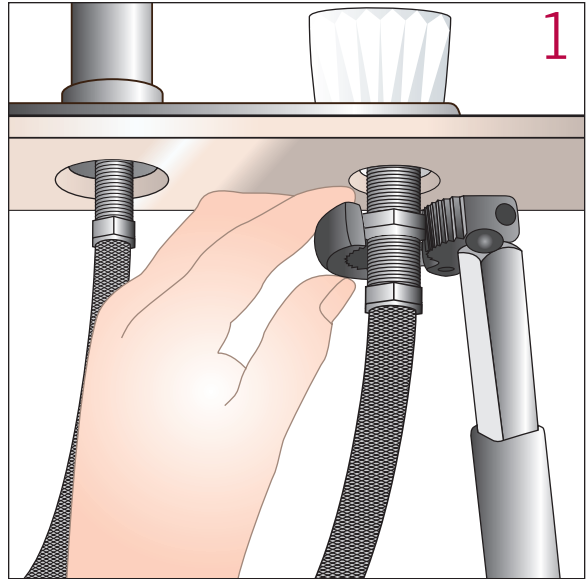
- Working under a sink is always cramped and awkward. To make more room for yourself, remove all your under-the-sink articles. (How do we accumulate so much stuff?)
- Put down an old pillow or blanket to lie on so you can be more comfortable as you work.
- Stand a lit flashlight under the sink for better visibility.
- If the nuts seem corroded and unmovable, spray them with penetrating oil and let them soak.

THE PROJECT

1 Examine the locking nuts under your faucet. With your pliers or basin wrench, tighten the nuts under the faucet until they're snug.

2 If the nuts have bottomed out, add a couple of rubber washers to each nut. This will add more depth to enable the nut to grab against the sink and pull down the faucet. To do so, first shut off the water at the shut-off valves, unscrew the supply lines with tongue-and-groove pliers, and then unscrew the nuts. Now you can add a couple of rubber washers inside the nuts. **Note:** Some faucets have a mounting nut(s) or plate that may be tightened where no supply line needs to be removed. Also certain faucets come with a special installation tool that is used to tighten this nut or plate.

3 Screw everything back into place, being careful not to overtighten.



Unclog a Drain

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Classic-style plunger (not the flanged type for toilets)

Petroleum jelly

Gloves and safety glasses*

* If applicable

Kitchen sink clogs are practically a given with all the food and grease that find their way down the drain (especially around the holidays when a clog is the *last* thing you need). Plunging a clog clear is highly effective when done properly. Follow these little tricks and save yourself a call to the plumber—and a ruined dinner party.

CONSIDER THIS

- When your sink first shows signs of a slow drain, try pouring boiling water down it to break up the formation of a clog.
- The best way to avoid clogs is not to let food debris—especially coffee grounds and grease—go down the drain to begin with.
- If you've already poured a chemical drain cleaner down the sink, you must wear eye protection and gloves in case there is splashing when plunging.

PREP WORK

- Make sure the sink has enough water in it so that the rubber of the plunger is submerged under water.
- Apply a bead of petroleum jelly around the rubber ring of the plunger to help create a better seal (a).



THE PROJECT

- 1 At an angle, place the plunger over the drain. Try to prevent air from being trapped in the plunger. Remember that water, not air, will force the clog down.
- 2 Thrust the plunger up and down about 20 times, always maintaining a seal.
- 3 On the last plunge, thrust the plunger up in one forceful motion.
- 4 Repeat if necessary. Add water if the rubber is no longer submerged in water.
- 5 Once the drain is clear, run hot water down it to clear any remaining debris.



A Word on Chemical Drain Cleaners

Chemical drain cleaners sound like the quick-and-easy solution to a clog—just pour it and forget it, right? Wrong. These products are extremely corrosive and can damage pipes as well as the user if not handled properly.

When poured in a standing clog, the product can sit at the bottom of a pipe and actually eat through it instead of the clog. Then, if the chemical fails to break through the clog and snaking is necessary, you run the risk of splashing these harsh chemicals everywhere while trying to clear the blockage.

Consider using an enzymatic drain cleaner that uses biological forms of chemical reactions to “metabolize” and clear the clog. These cleaners do take longer to respond to a clog, but they’re noncorrosive, making them safer for you, your pipes, and the environment.

If you do choose to use a chemical drain cleaner, follow these safety tips:

- Never look down over the drain during or after pouring in a chemical drain cleaner—it can give off toxic fumes and actually erupt.
- Never mix chemical products—a chemical reaction could cause boiling and splattering.
- Choose the right cleaner for the specific clog—for example, some products work better on grease as opposed to hair.
- Always wear safety glasses and gloves, and work in a ventilated area.
- Always follow all the manufacturer’s safety precautions.

Fix a Sprayer

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Toothbrush

White vinegar

Small container for soaking

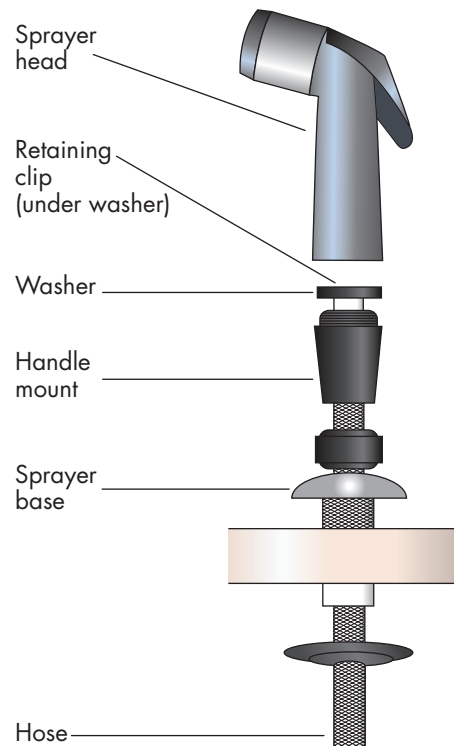
Replacement washer/rings*

* If applicable

When a sprayer leaks or loses its ability to spray, it's usually due to mineral deposits that build up around the nozzle and/or washers and rings. A good soak and brushing makes for an easy fix.

CONSIDER THIS

If you're having difficulty pulling out the sprayer, check the hose under the cabinet. It's probably getting tangled around some plumbing or under-the-sink paraphernalia.



THE PROJECT

- 1 Unscrew the sprayer from the hose.
- 2 Brush the nozzle with vinegar. If there is a lot of buildup, soak it in vinegar. Be careful not to let it soak for too long, because this may mar the finish.
- 3 Run water through the sprayer to clear out any debris.
- 4 Inspect any washers or rings. (Remember in what order you remove them.) Soak and scrub these if there's buildup. These parts may need to be replaced if they're highly corroded.
- 5 Screw back the sprayer, turn on the water, and check for leaks.

