



Barbecue Safety Tips – Identifying Hazards and Risks of the BBQ

Everyone loves a barbecue but few people are aware the hazards and dangers of the humble backyard BBQ and how to avoid them.

The main safety risk is with the LPG cylinder and the fitting as compressed gas can be very dangerous and must be handled with care.

The other dangers are fire, food safety and the hazards associated with keeping the barbecue clean.

Surprisingly the latest hazard is caused by wire bristles shed by brushes used to clean barbecues can stick to the grill surface BBQ, get into the food and be ingested and get caught in the intestines, requiring surgery.

This article reviews all the safety hazards and risks of barbecuing and provides tips on how to avoid and manage them.

Be warned of the dangers of wire barbecue cleaning brush bristles

Several cases have been reported recently of people requiring surgery to remove wire bristles shed from barbecue-cleaning brushes they had accidentally swallowed while eating food cooked on a grill. The metal bristles were apparently lost from the brush and became lodged somewhere on the grill surface. The bristles were transferred to steaks and burgers and ingested with the food.

The patients reported to hospital with severe neck or abdominal pains and trouble swallowing after eating meat grilled on barbecues. In the emergency section of the hospital, imaging tests detected small wire bristles lodged in various parts of their bodies. Investigations have shown that the wire bristles came from wire brushes used to clean the grills.

None of the cases so far reported were fatal, but many patients required various medical interventions to remove the bristles from their throat, necks and upper intestine. In other cases wire bristles have perforated the lower intestinal wall and have had to be removed by surgery, colonoscopy and other procedures.

People should take various precautions to avoid the hazard of stray wire bristles. This includes throwing out old worn metal brushes, and finding other ways to clean the grates and grills. There are various nylon and other plastic brushes that may be used as a substitute. Stray bristles from these will burn and are generally benign if ingested.

If grills are cleaned with a wire brush, very careful inspection of the grill is required before cooking on it. Choose brushes with shiny light colored bristles that are easier to find on the grill. Always wipe down the grill carefully to dislodge and stray bristles.

Chemical cleaning agents should also be carefully washed off as they can be hazardous as well.

Other Barbecue Hazards

Fire Hazards with Barbecues

Every year barbecue grills and smokers trigger hundreds and thousands of blazes, hundreds of wounds, dozens of killings and many millions of dollars in damage. Cylinders of compressed gas are one of the most dangerous domestic items imaginable - far more dangerous than gasoline if the gas containers explode!

Everyone operating a barbecue needs to understand how to switch off fuel supplies, quench or smother blazes and call the fire department. The risks and hazards should not be underestimated.

Some precautions:

- Never use the wrong type of gas in a barbecue or the incorrect fuel in a charcoal barbecue. The data and registration plate attached to the barbecue should clearly state the proper type of gas fuel for your BBQ model.
- Don't barbecue in confined spaces, under low roofs or indoors - the smoke and fumes can be harmful and you could easily start a fire if the food or BBQ bursts into flames.
- Make certain there is adequate clear space around your barbecue to reduce the risk of fires spreading.
- After using your barbecue, eliminate all surplus fat so it doesn't build up and become a blaze risk.
- Don't use gas barbecues when it's very breezy, as the burners might blow out, allowing gas to leak and build up and risk causing an explosive ignition when the burner is re-ignited.
- Make certain the barbecue is on a flat, solid surface where there is minimal risk of it toppling over or being dislodged. Keep the barbecue away from trees, shrubs, hedges, fences.
- Never attempt to move a barbecue that is alight and burning.

- Do not use flammable solvents to start a barbecue and do not add them to a barbecue that is burning.
- Keep a fire extinguisher or blaze bedding handy and make sure you know how to use them properly.
- Never leave a barbecue unattended particularly when there are young children in the group.
- Keep a squirt bottle of cold water handy to douse blazes in flare-ups and to control minor flames when the food catch alight.
- Dispose of ashes safely and always confirm they are absolutely cold and have no glowing embers before disposal.
- Assign one person to take charge for the barbecue and remember that excessive alcoholic consumption and barbecuing do not go together. Many accidents happen when people do silly things.
- Keep young children and pets exclude from the barbecue area at all times, even after the cooking has finished. Children can still get burnt on a cooling barbecue that is switched off
- Wear appropriate clothes without dangly bits that can catch fire or clothes that are very flammable.

Smoke Hazards when Barbecuing

Smoke gets in your hair, eyes, clothes and lungs and is a health hazard. Smoke from barbecues, especially those that are not functioning properly can contain carbon monoxide, carcinogens and various other dangerous substances. Cancer causing substances can be released when grease burns. As much as possible you should avoid inhaling the smoke and ensure that any smoke produced can be vented away from people.

Dangers cause by Grease Build-up in Barbecues

Flare-ups due to grease build-up can be more than a nuisance and ruin the food, they can start a fire. Grease collects in your grill can builds up over time if its not removed regularly. It is important to keep your grill clean so that your food is not tainted and there are no safety risks. So no matter what type of barbecue you use, you need to stop the grease building up.

Precautions When Handling LPG Cylinders

- Don't leave cylinders in the car.
- Gas bottles should never be stored indoors.
- Gas bottles should always be stored upright.
- BBQs should never be used near flammable objects.
- Do not store gas bottles near an ignition source.
- Check connections to make sure they're clean and fit snugly.
- Children should be kept safely away from BBQs and gas bottles.
- It is best to store gas bottles outdoors in a well ventilated space.
- Always keep LPG cylinders upright - they shouldn't be laid on their side.
- BBQs should NEVER be used indoors because of the risk of toxic fumes, smoke or even fire.
- Don't store cylinders indoors - including the garage, shed or under the house. Keep them outdoors.
- Adequate ventilation is essential when using a BBQ to allow the gas to burn and burnt gases to dissipate.
- Use the correct type of hose. Do not make temporary connections. Keep hose gently curved to prevent kinks and damage.
- If you store your BBQ or patio heater indoors, when not in use, you should always detach the gas bottle first and store it separately outdoors
- Cracked or damaged hoses and/or gas regulators should be replaced before use. Replace hoses every five years and sooner if they start to perish.

- When transporting a cylinder, make sure it's well secured so it can't roll around. Wedge it into the back of your vehicle so it can't move, or tie it up with a strap.
- Replace cylinders if they appear damaged or rusty. Check them for leaks by spraying or brushing a soapy water solution onto them - bubbles will form if gas is escaping. You can also check hose ends and regulator connections this way - it's important to check the whole barbecue/cylinder set-up, not just the cylinder itself.
- Cylinders can't be refilled if they haven't been tested in the last 10 years, or if they're damaged. You can tell how old your cylinder is by looking at the date stamped on the collar. To get your cylinder tested, look in the gas cylinder testing section of the Yellow Pages. Testing costs around \$33 and includes valve replacement.

Food Handling Tips for Barbecues

1. Always wash your hands after handling raw poultry and meats.
2. Wash and dry cutting boards in between prepping raw food items to prevent contamination.
3. Never use the same serving utensils or plates for raw and cooked food!
4. In hot weather above 90°F, do not let food sit out for more than 1 hour.
5. Discard food left out more than 2 hours!
6. Keep cold foods cold below 40°F, and hot food hot above 140°F (never between 40-140°F).
7. Refrigerate leftover perishable foods within 2 hours below 40°F, discard beyond that time.

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