



THE KITCHEN IN THE AGE OF LOADSHEDDING

Load shedding has become the new norm in South Africa. Many homes have started the move to alternate energy sources whether that is in the form of a basic inverter to keep a few lights and the WIFI on, going semi off grid with solar or a full scale off grid move. Either way your kitchen needs to keep on functioning and be protected.

More and more insurance companies are refusing claims of damage to major appliances due to loadshedding. The unpredictable spikes in electricity can over time damage appliances like fridges, freezers, cookers and ovens. All of these are costly home assets so the first place to start is to protect them from these surges. First step is to add a surge protector to your DB board – ensure this covers the isolator switch for your cooker or oven as well as the general plugs on the board. Secondly, protect each individual appliances with a specialised appliance surge protector plug. This may seem like over kill, but it beats having to replace or do a major repair on a costly appliance.

Most kitchen appliances won't work off a small-scale inverter, especially any with a heating element. That is why having a gas hob is a great asset. Not only does it ensure that you can still cook but you can use a gas stove kettle and a camping toaster

and cover most of the bases this way. There are a few recommendations if moving to gas – firstly ensure you are complying with the required gas safety regulations. If the bottle is in a cupboard in the kitchen, ensure it has a shut off valve and is 1m away from an electric or water point. The cupboard itself must be ventilated and the installation must be done and signed off by a qualified and registered gas plumber or your insurance won't cover you in the event of an accident.

When selecting your gas hob make sure it can be started with a match, most hobs can but there are a few that can't. It is also suggested that you look at the kilowatts of the burners. A 6kw burner will allow you to effectively fry at high heat. When the hob is being installed ensure that the simmers are set on each burner to your liking (this determines how low the flame can go before it goes out and will help you simmer better with gas). Also consider a diffuser – this sits on top of the burner and is a bit like a wire mesh or metal plate – this enables slow cooking which is not always easy on gas.



While you might consider looking at a gas oven as well, this is not as easy as a gas hob. Gas ovens are difficult and potentially dangerous to light when their electrical automatic ignition is not working. Also, when there is no electricity their cooling fans can't work which makes the unit overheat.

When the power is out for long periods one of the main concerns is the fridge and freezer and preserving food integrity. It is a great idea to find out how long your freezer can keep your food safe - most freezer handbooks will tell you this. Modern good quality freezers can keep your food safe for as long as 30 hours – providing the door is kept closed. Try and keep your freezer at -17°C to ensure best long-term results. When it comes to your fridge ensure that its temperature is at 4°C or below and avoid opening the refrigerator regularly to maintain the cold temperature. It is also a good idea to freeze containers of water to help keep food cold if the power goes out – these can be moved into the fridge section if needed to help keep that section cool.

If you are still at the full mercy of loadshedding it might be an idea to look at a pressure cooker. While this can only be used while you have power it will facilitate you being able to cook a meal similar to those cooked over several hours in the oven in a far shorter time meaning you are not being held to ransom by loadshedding quite so much.

If you have made the move to being semi off grid, then you have a lot more battery power generated from solar, but it is still limited. Here it is not wise to operate large heat generating appliances when Eskom power is out. So, your oven, tumble dryer, washing machine and high-powered microwave are best left out of use if you are relying on battery power. But you can use your toaster, a small sandwich maker, air fryer, lower power microwaves and slow cookers. This gives you far more freedom.



The great thing is that you should be able to keep your fridge/freezer running which gives great peace of mind about food integrity. What you should do to ensure you get as much mileage as possible from your batteries is to ensure your larger appliances are as energy efficient as possible. Check the energy rating labels for clarity but remember that as technology changes so do energy ratings and what was as a A+++ may now be a B or a C. Rather look to the actual kw rating on the label, this will allow an accurate comparison. Also, don't be afraid to use the eco function on your dishwasher or washing machine. Many people don't like them because they take a long time, but they use very little energy and let's face it – time is free, electricity is not.

Lastly, make sure you have a plan for lighting. There is no point being able to cook in the kitchen but then cutting your finger because you can't see anything. The addition of battery-operated emergency lights is an essential if you have no battery backup. But a great addition is rechargeable light bulbs. These can keep your primary light sources going for some time while the power is off ensuring you can use your kitchen safely and effectively despite the lack of power.

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