FREE HOMEOWNER GUIDE

Kitchen outlets not working? Check the counter circuits

The answer, first

Dead kitchen outlets are usually one of two things: a tripped GFCI, or a tripped breaker on one of the countertop circuits. Kitchens are wired differently from the rest of the house. In a kitchen wired to modern code, the countertop outlets are split across at least two 20-amp circuits, and they are required to have GFCI protection.

That is why it is common for half the counter to go dead while the other half, the lights, and the refrigerator keep working. The pattern is a useful clue. If only some of the counter outlets are out, you are looking for one GFCI or one breaker, not a whole-kitchen failure.

Find the GFCI that controls them

One GFCI outlet, the kind with Test and Reset buttons, usually protects every counter outlet after it on the same circuit. The dead outlets themselves often have no buttons, so you have to go looking for the one that does.

When you find it, press Reset firmly until it clicks and stays in. If the button will not click in at all, the GFCI may have no power coming to it, which means a breaker tripped upstream. Reset the breaker first, fully OFF and then ON, and then the GFCI. These are the places to look.

- [ ] Every counter outlet, including ones hidden behind the coffee maker, the toaster, or a row of canisters
- [ ] The island or peninsula, often on the end panel or under the overhang
- [ ] Inside an appliance garage or a pantry cabinet
- [ ] The dining nook or the wall next to the kitchen, which often shares a kitchen circuit
- [ ] The panel. A breaker with a Test button is a GFCI or AFCI breaker doing the same job

Why kitchen circuits trip: appliance loads

The kitchen is where the heaviest plug-in appliances live. A toaster oven, an electric kettle, an air fryer, a coffee maker, a countertop microwave: check the labels and most are between 1,000 and 1,800 watts. A 20-amp circuit tops out at 2,400 watts, so two of them running at once on the same circuit can trip the breaker.

The fix on the day is to move one appliance to an outlet on the other counter circuit. If a single appliance trips the breaker alone, or the breaker trips with almost nothing running, that is a fault, not an overload. Our page on why a breaker keeps tripping explains the difference.

Older Portland kitchens have less to work with. Houses built before the 1960s often have one circuit for the whole kitchen, sometimes shared with the dining room, and it was never planned for an air fryer and an espresso machine. A remodel that added outlets without adding circuits makes it worse. The lasting fix is new dedicated circuits, which is part of our residential electrical work.

Water, and the outlets you do not see

A GFCI trips when it senses current leaking where it should not go, and a kitchen gives it plenty of reasons: splash behind the sink, a wet counter under an appliance, steam, or a failing heating element in an old toaster or kettle. To find a bad appliance, unplug everything on the dead outlets, reset the GFCI, and plug things back in one at a time. Our GFCI keeps tripping page goes deeper.

Not every kitchen outlet is on the counter. The disposal and dishwasher usually plug in under the sink, and the disposal outlet is controlled by the wall switch, so it reads dead whenever the switch is off. A disposal that does nothing at all may have tripped its own overload, and the red reset button is on the bottom of the unit. A slow leak under the sink can also wet that outlet and trip the protection. The refrigerator and a built-in microwave are often on their own circuits with their own breakers.

When to stop and call

Reset once. If anything on the list below happens, leave it off and call us.

One item on the list needs a note. Outlets that are dead with nothing tripped usually mean a failed connection at one outlet in the chain. Our page on power out with no breaker tripped explains how that happens.

- [ ] The GFCI will not reset, or trips right away with everything unplugged
- [ ] The breaker trips again as soon as you reset it
- [ ] An outlet is warm, discolored, buzzing, or smells burnt
- [ ] You saw a spark or heard a pop when the outlets went dead
- [ ] The outlets are dead and nothing is tripped anywhere
- [ ] Water got into an outlet from a leak or an overflow

What an electrician does to find and fix it

We identify which circuit the dead outlets are on and which device protects it. A GFCI that has worn out is tested and replaced. If the GFCI and breaker are both fine and the outlets are still dead, we trace the chain to the open connection, which is usually a burned or loose terminal at the last working outlet or the first dead one.

We also measure what the circuit is actually carrying. If the kitchen needs another circuit more than it needs another reset, we will tell you that plainly and price it before any work. Either way it starts as electrical repair.

Frequently asked questions

Why did half my kitchen outlets stop working?

In most kitchens the counter outlets are split across two or more circuits, so losing half of them means one circuit is off. Usually a GFCI outlet on that circuit has tripped, or its breaker has. Press Reset on every GFCI in the kitchen, including ones hidden behind appliances, then check the panel for a breaker sitting in the middle position.

Where is the GFCI reset for my kitchen outlets?

It is usually on one of the counter outlets, often the first one on that circuit, and it can be hidden behind a countertop appliance. Also check the island, an appliance garage, the pantry, and the dining nook. In some homes the protection is a breaker with a Test button in the panel instead of an outlet.

Why does my kitchen breaker trip when I use the microwave and toaster together?

Both are high-wattage appliances, and together they can exceed what one circuit can carry. A 20-amp circuit handles about 2,400 watts. Plug one of them into an outlet on the other counter circuit. If the kitchen has only one circuit, or the trips are frequent, adding a dedicated circuit is the real fix.

Do kitchen outlets have to be GFCI protected?

Yes for countertop outlets. The National Electrical Code has required GFCI protection in kitchens since 1987, and the coverage has widened since then. A kitchen wired before that, and never updated, may have none. Adding GFCI protection to an older kitchen is a straightforward upgrade.

Why won't my kitchen GFCI reset?

Either it is still sensing a fault, it has no power coming in, or it has worn out. Unplug everything on the dead outlets and try again. If it still will not click in, check for a tripped breaker. If the breaker is on and the GFCI will not hold with nothing plugged in, the device or the wiring behind it needs a licensed electrician.

Sources

1. GFCI Fact Sheet (Publication 099), U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. https://www.cpsc.gov/s3fs-public/099_0.pdf
2. Electrical Safety (safety tip sheet), National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). https://www.nfpa.org/-/media/project/storefront/catalog/files/safety-tip-sheets/electricalsafetytips.pdf
3. Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters, Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI). https://www.esfi.org/program/ground-fault-circuit-interrupters/

> **Need a licensed electrician in the Portland area?**
> Call Smiley Electric at (503) 484-7556 (Mon–Sat, 7am–5pm) or visit smileyelectric.net/contact. For sparks, smoke, a burning smell or a hot panel, turn off the power if it is safe and call right away.

Reviewed by Joshua Smiley, owner & master electrician, Smiley Electric. Last reviewed November 13, 2026. Online version: smileyelectric.net/help/kitchen-outlets-not-working/. General information, not a substitute for an on-site inspection.

Cite this page: Smiley Electric. “Kitchen outlets not working? Check the counter circuits.” smileyelectric.net/help/kitchen-outlets-not-working/. Last reviewed November 13, 2026. You are welcome to quote, print or share this page with credit to Smiley Electric and a link to smileyelectric.net/help/kitchen-outlets-not-working/.