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Home Appliance Repair Troubleshooting Guide

Family Circle Articles

"Save Big Money On Appliance Repairs"

By Al Ubell and Label Shulman

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Home Appliance Checkup

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Before you call a repair person to fix your washer or dryer, consider this fact: 20% to 25% of all appliance repairs involve no-part, absolutely do-it-yourself remedies that even the most non-mechanically-inclined person can do. So don't pay a repair person \$25 to \$50 when you can easily do it. To help you diagnose and fix your major appliances, we've organized this simple repair chart. It tells you what steps to take when your refrigerator or dishwasher isn't working right.

Electrical Appliances (general overview)

Problem/Symptom	Possible Cause	Solution
Unit doesn't work (it makes no sounds, will not start or stops working).	No electricity is reaching the appliance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check to see if plug has fallen out, or is loose in the receptacle. If loose, twist both prongs slightly with pliers. • Check wall receptacle. Plug in a small lamp you know is working. If lamp doesn't light, check fuse or circuit breaker. • Reset circuit breaker or change fuse; replace fuse with one of appropriate amperage. (Do not increase amperage of fuse.) • Check wall switch; it may control outlet. • Check appliance switch or dial settings. • Check reset button (if there is one on your appliance). • If appliance has a detachable cord, check cord connection at the appliance.
Unit starts, but repeatedly blows fuses or trips circuit breaker.	Loose wire connection in appliance plug.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unplug appliance. Tighten electrical connection in plug, if accessible, with screwdriver.
	Overloaded electric circuit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce work load (too big a load in the clothes dryer) and/or clean appliance (clogged air conditioner filter), according to the manufacturer's instructions.
	Too many appliances on electrical circuit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unplug one or more appliances, and restart needed appliances.
	Unit is overheated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wait about 10 minutes and restart. • Check for proper ventilation (as per manufacturer's suggestions). • Clean filters and ventilators, as required.

Gas Appliances

Includes hot-water heaters, gas clothes dryers, gas ovens, ranges and space heaters.

Problem/Symptom	Possible Cause	Solution
Flame doesn't ignite.	Pilot light is out.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Relight pilot light, as per unit's instructions.
	Gas supply is shut off.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Check gas-line cutoff valve, at the unit. Open if necessary. Light pilot.Check main gas-line valve. If it has been closed, call utility company.Check propane gas tank, if you use bottled gas. Switch to auxiliary and call supplier for new standby tank. Light pilot.
	Pilot does not stay lighted.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Clean pilot light opening, if possible, with a thin wire and brush away any dirt. Light pilot.Call utility company.Check area for unusual drafts, which may Mow out pilot light.
Gas Odor	Pilot light is out.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Relight pilot light
	Gas leak	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Call utility company immediately!
Soot and carbon buildup (burner Is also noisy).	Improper gas and air mixture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Call utility company. Don't attempt to adjust this yourself.

Refrigerator & Freezer Appliances

Always check the temperature control dial first when you're troubleshooting a cooling problem with a refrigerator/freezer. This is often the reason for problems. Set at "recommended setting" in appliance "Use & Care" manual.

Problem/Symptom	Possible Cause	Solution
Unit doesn't cool (lights and compressor operate).	Dirty or clogged condenser coil (lint, dust and dirt).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Clean the coils on the bottom or back of refrigerator or freezer with brush or vacuum. Inside light doesn't work.
Inside light doesn't work.	Bulb connection loose. Bulb burned out.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Remove and reinsert bulb.Replace with special appliance bulb (made for your make or model).
	Light switch stuck.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Tap and release door switch button; then clean.
Frost builds up quickly; moisture on shelves.	Door not closing property.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Readjust door, as per manufacturer's instructions.Pitch unit slightly back, by extending bottom front levelers. For some models, small wedges may be needed in front, under legs.
Excessive operating noise.	Drain pan rattles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Replace drain pan in proper position under the appliance.
	Refrigerator not level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Adjust leveling legs as per manufacturer's Instructions.
Moisture on doors or cabinet exterior.	Improper setting on front edge trim heater (energy-saving switch on some models).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Adjust switch to proper setting. Use of switch is usually only necessary in the summer, because of high humidity.
Water on floor.	Drain pan not aligned.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Reset drain pan in carriage.
	Drain pan is broken.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Replace drain pan, or repair with epoxy cement.
	Leaky icemaker or water dispenser.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Clean drain tube with baking soda, or scrape tube gently with a soft length of wire.

Oven & Range Appliances

Note: Before working on an electric-range problem, unplug electric range and/or disconnect fuse or trip circuitbreaker.

Problem/Symptom	Possible Cause	Solution
Surface heating element is not operating.	Burned-out heating element.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Purchase new, matching heating element for your make and model (plug-in type). Remove by pulling out terminals from mounting plug. Insert new element into plug slots.If unit has a two-wire, three-wire, or four-wire type heating element, it can be easily replaced with a screwdriver or adjustable wrench.
Oven and surface units don't bum evenly.	Clogged burner openings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Clean openings with pipe cleaners, or remove burners and soak in a strong detergent solution.
Heat escaping around oven door.	Oven door not properly aligned.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Adjust and/or tighten loose screws.
Oven baking temperature is	Oven vent is blocked.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Remove any blockages. Adjust vent, if necessary.

Problem/Symptom	Possible Cause	Solution
incorrect.	Oven door not adjusted.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjust and/or tighten loose screws.
Receptacles and clock-timer don't work.	Blown range fuse (on some models).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check and/or replace range fuse. See "Use & Care" manual for instructions.
Self-cleaning cycle doesn't work.	Blown range fuse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check and/or replace range fuse.
	Door-latching mechanism doesn't close properly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open and reclose door-latch mechanism.
Oven lamp doesn't work.	Burned-out bulb.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replace bulb with special oven-type bulb.
	Bulb connection loose.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove and re-insert bulb.
	Switch button stuck.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tap and release door switch, then clean.

Dishwasher Appliances

Problem/Symptom	Possible Cause	Solution
Insufficient amount of water or no water.	Selector switch or timer is set past FILL cycle.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reset timing mechanism to the beginning of the cycle.
	Closed or partially closed faucet connection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open water valve or faucet fully.
	Kinked fill hose.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Straighten hose to remove kink.
Water doesn't shut off.	Float switch obstructed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear debris or obstruction away from float switch (accessible on some models).
Water doesn't pump out.	Kinked drain hose.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Straighten drain hose.
	Garbage disposal on sink not cleared.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run garbage disposal unit to remove the garbage.
	Door opened before end of cycle.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue cycle to completion, or recycle.
	Timer control was advanced prematurely.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reset cycle, or continue cycle to end.
Dishwasher leaks.	Door not latched properly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open door and relatch.
	Unit not level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjust levelers on bottom of machine, as per manufacturer's instructions.

Washing Machine Appliances

Problem/Symptom	Possible Cause	Solution
Washer will not fill.	Clogged valve screen on water inlet hose.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shut water faucet valves. Remove hose connections at faucet or faucets and the machine. Clean all hose and valve screens (check both ends of hoses).
	Kinked water hose.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Straighten water hose.
	Faucet valve closed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check and open faucet valve(s) fully.
Water on floor surrounding machine.	Hose connections are loose.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check and tighten connections to machine and/or replace hose connection washers on faucets.
	Hose leaks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check hoses, and replace if indicated with special washing machine inlet water hoses (readily available in all home centers and hardware stores).
	Wash tub overflows due to blocked drain.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean tub drain regularly. TIP: Cover end of washing machine drain with the toe-end of pantyhose and secure with tightly wound rubber bands. Or, install a special lint-catch screen on drain hose. Check and clean frequently.
Washer fills with water, but will not spin.	Door switch not activated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open and reclose door to machine. Check for dirt/debris at door hinge or switch.
Machine will not drain.	Drain hose blocked.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Straighten drain hose. Clear end of hose to free of debris.

Problem/Symptom	Possible Cause	Solution
Washer is noisy.	Drain hose outlet too high.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top of drain hose outlet should be less than seven feet above floor. Reposition if needed.
	Machine is not level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reset adjustable legs on bottom of machine so it sits level and is securely balanced.
	Unbalanced load.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop machine. Check load balance. Redistribute clothes evenly.

Clothes Dryer Appliances

Problem/Symptom	Possible Cause	Solution
Motor runs but dryer does not heat.	Blown fuse or tripped circuit on one side of 220-volt power line.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All electric dryers have two fuses or two circuit breakers. One of these pairs is either blown or tripped. Replace or reset.
Clothes overheat.	Vent connection is blocked or vent pipe has too many bends.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean vent pipe connection of lint or debris. Pipe should have no more than two bends and be no longer than 10' - 20' feet. Check installation instructions.
Dryer unit will not shut off.	Room in which machine is located is too cold.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install unit in warmer room (should be 50°F or more), or provide adequate heat to existing room.
Clothes do not dry, or drying time is too long.	Dryer is overloaded.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check "Use & Care" manual for proper load levels.
	Improper vent installation; lint blockage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean vent pipe connection of lint or debris. Pipe should have no more than two bends and be no longer than 10' - 20' feet. Check installation instructions.
	Lint screen is blocked.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean lint screen periodically, as required.
Dryer is noisy.	Dryer is not level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reset leveling legs so unit sits balanced and secure.



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