

Rabbinic decrees relating to Cooking

Beyond the actions prohibited by Torah law due to Cooking, the Sages issued decrees prohibiting several actions related to heating food. Some of the decrees stem from the concern that in the context of the effort to maintain the heat of the food, one might ultimately **stoke the coals** in order to intensify the heat, thereby violating the prohibition by Torah law of **Igniting**. In other cases, the Sages prohibited (according to certain *Rishonim*) **actions that look like Cooking** (*mehze keMevashel*).

There are three primary decrees issued by the Sages:

1. **Keeping** – One may not place food on the fire **before Shabbat** so that it will continue to be cooked or heated on Shabbat.
2. **Returning or placing initially** – With regard to a **cooked item** that was on the fire when Shabbat began and was then removed from it, one may not **return it** onto the fire **on Shabbat**; all the more so, one may not place a cooked item on the fire on Shabbat that was not on the fire when Shabbat began.
3. **Insulating** – One may not cover a pot that is on the fire on Shabbat. There are several types of covers, and likewise, there is a difference between insulating a pot **before Shabbat** and insulating a pot **on Shabbat**.

What is the prohibition of keeping?

The Sages prohibited leaving cooked food on the fire before Shabbat so that it will continue to be cooked on Shabbat, due to the concern that a person eager to accelerate the cooking will **stoke the coals** in order to intensify the fire, thereby violating the prohibition of **Igniting**. In modern terms, the concern is that the person will increase the temperature of the fire.

Nevertheless, the Sages permitted leaving a cooked item on the fire before Shabbat in cases where there is no concern that one will stoke the coals. For example, in a case where the oven is fueled with fuel that does not become coal (e.g., straw), and likewise, in a case where the person **swept out** the coals from the oven, or **covered them with ashes** as an indication that they are not eager to accelerate the cooking and will not stoke the coals (pp. 445–447).

Why is it permitted to leave cooked items on a Shabbat hotplate?

The halakhic status of a Shabbat hotplate, or a stovetop covered with sheet metal (*blech*), is that of a stove whose coals were **swept out or covered with ashes**, and it is permitted to place cooked items on them before Shabbat. The reason is that covering the fire is considered a sufficient reminder, since this is not the typical manner of cooking, and all the more so, there is room for leniency in the case of a Shabbat hotplate in which there is no possibility of intensifying the fire (pp. 461–467).

What cooked food may one leave on a Shabbat hotplate or on a covered fire before Shabbat?

According to the basic *halakha*, before Shabbat it is permitted to place **any food in any state** on a covered fire or on a Shabbat hotplate. Yet, it is worthwhile to accustom oneself to place only cooked food on the Shabbat hotplate in order to avoid potential pitfalls, e.g., moving the pot to a hotter area of the hotplate or removing and replacing

the pot cover before the cooking is concluded, thereby violating the prohibition of Cooking by Torah law, as mentioned above.

Since according to the basic *halakha* placing any food on the Shabbat hotplate is permitted (if one is careful to warn the members of the household not to move the pot and not to remove and replace the cover, or if one places a clear indicator to prevent them from doing so), it is permitted to place food that is not fully cooked as well. It makes no difference at what stage of the cooking process it has reached. For example, it is permitted to place cold soup or any other liquid cooked food that cooled on the hotplate before Shabbat, even if it will not be heated before Shabbat (pp. 473–477).

What cooked food may one leave on an exposed fire before Shabbat?

The **Gemara** (20a) cites the opinion of Ḥananya, who says that it is permitted to leave a cooked item that was partially cooked before Shabbat to the level of *maakhal ben Derosai* (half-cooked according to the **Rambam** and one-third cooked according to **Rashi**). The reason is that since the food is already fit for consumption, at least minimally, a person is not as eager to accelerate its cooking, and there is no concern that they will stoke the coals for that purpose.

The **Gemara** (36b) is uncertain whether the *halakha* is in accordance with the opinion of Ḥananya, and the *Rishonim* disagree concerning the matter. The **Rema** (253:1) rules leniently in accordance with Ḥananya's opinion, and many hold that this is the ruling of the *Shulḥan Arukh* (253:1) as well. On that basis, it is permitted for Ashkenazim to place food that was cooked before Shabbat to the level of *maakhal ben Derosai* even on an open fire on Shabbat. This is also the practice of most Sephardim.

The **Gemara** (18b) adds that it is permitted to leave **food that is completely uncooked** (“a pot of raw meat”) on an exposed fire. Since in any case it will not be ready for the evening meal, and will certainly be ready for the morning meal, there would be no incentive for the person to stoke the coals to accelerate the cooking.

The halakhic conclusion is that **the prohibition to leave food on an open fire applies only to food whose cooking began but did not yet reach the level of *maakhal ben Derosai***. Concerning food that is completely raw (which will not be ready for the evening meal in any case) or partially cooked food that reached the level of *maakhal ben Derosai* (half-cooked or one-third cooked), it is permitted to place it before Shabbat even on an exposed fire (pp. 447–457).

How may one leave cooked foods on a stovetop?

One who wishes to leave food whose cooking began but has not yet reached the level of *maakhal ben Derosai* on a stovetop, one must transform it into a stove whose coals are swept out or covered with ashes. To that end, he must **cover the flames**. Covering the dials is not sufficient, as an indication is required in the fire itself. Nevertheless, for Ashkenazim (based on **Rema** 254:1) it may suffice to **immobilize the dials**, as then it would be necessary to perform an action in order to turn the dials, and one would be reminded that it is Shabbat. In general, people are stringent and cover both the flames and the dials, but there are grounds for leniency and to merely cover the flames or immobilize the dials. For Sephardim (based on *Shulhan Arukh* 254:1), immobilizing the dials is not enough; one is required to cover the flames (pp. 469–472).

The prohibition of returning: Is it permitted to replace on the fire food that had been on the fire and was removed from it?

The Sages prohibited returning food that had been on the fire and was removed from it, unless certain conditions are fulfilled:

1. **There is no prohibition of Cooking** – The food is fully cooked. If it is liquid, it must be somewhat warm, and for Sephardim it must be *yad soledet*.
2. **The stove is considered one whose coals were swept out or covered with ashes** (based on **Mishna** 36b) – Otherwise there

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is concern that one will stoke the coals (**Rabbeinu Tam**), or that it would appear that one is cooking (**Rashba**). Today, one must ensure that the stovetop is covered or that one returns the food to a Shabbat hotplate.

3. Placing it on the fire must be considered a **continuation of its previous time on the fire** and not as placing it anew (based on **Gemara and Rashi 38b**). Therefore:
 - a. With a pot that is not heavy, one must hold the pot with the intent to return it.
 - b. With a heavy pot, one may be lenient and place it on the counter with intent to return it, and if possible to also hold the handle.
 - c. If one is returning it to a Shabbat hotplate, there are grounds to be lenient and place the pot on the counter with intent to return it.
 - d. *Bediavad*, even if one placed it on the counter without intent to return it, one may be lenient and return it (pp. 479–494).