Drain Clog Decision Chart

Find the symptom, name the cause, start on the right rung of the method ladder.
From vitaldwelling.com — "How to Unclog Any Drain: The Step-by-Step Method Ladder".

SYMPTOM → CAUSE → METHOD

SYMPTOM	LIKELY CAUSE	METHOD — START HERE
Kitchen sink drains slowly; worse after cooking, greasy smell	Grease hardened on the pipe walls	RUNG 1 — Boiling water + dish soap, poured in stages
One sink or tub drains slowly; everything else in the house is fine	Soap scum and gunk near the trap	RUNG 2 — Plunger, done right: seal the overflow, petroleum-jelly rim
Shower or tub pools around your ankles; long hair in the house	Hair mat caught at the drain	RUNG 3 — Hair wand (Drain Weasel): in, crank, pull it out whole
Drain fully blocked; plunger and wand both failed	Deep obstruction past the trap	RUNG 4 — 25-ft drum auger: feed, lock, crank clockwise
Same drain re-clogs every few weeks after you clear it	Grease and soap film rebuilding on the walls	RUNG 5 — Enzyme dissolver overnight, once a month (Green Gobbler)
Several drains back up at once; lowest drain overflows; toilet flush fills the shower	MAIN LINE problem — not a single clog	**STOP — Call a plumber. No ladder rung fixes a main line.**

KEEP IT FROM COMING BACK

- Tub and shower: a hair catcher inside the drain (TubShroom) grabs hair before it becomes a mat — wipe it once a week.
- Kitchen: never pour cooking grease down the drain. Let it harden, scrape it into the trash, wipe the pan, then wash.
- Every drain: an enzyme dissolver treatment once a month keeps grease and soap film from rebuilding on the walls.

Two safety rules before you climb:

Never mix chemical drain openers — combined, they can release toxic gas. And never run a snake right after pouring chemicals: the cable drags the liquid back up and splashes it. Gloves and eye protection, always.

THE LADDER, ON ONE LINE

Grease gets heat · near the top gets pressure · hair gets pulled out whole · deep gets 25 feet of cable · monthly enzymes keep you off the ladder. Total kit: about $45 — versus $150–350 per plumber visit.