



**TC Home Inspections**  
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## **GFCI outlets**

A **GFCI** is much more subtle. When you look at a normal 120-volt outlet in the United States, there are two vertical slots and then a round hole centered below them. The left slot is slightly larger than the right. The left slot is called "neutral," the right slot is called "hot" and the hole below them is called "ground." If an appliance is working properly, all electricity that the appliance uses will flow from hot to neutral. A GFCI **monitors the amount of current flowing from hot to neutral**. If there is any **imbalance**, it **trips the circuit**. It is able to sense a mismatch as small as 4 or 5 milliamps, and it can react as quickly as one-thirtieth of a second.

## **Example of how a GFCI protects you**

So let's say you are inside the kitchen and your can opener slips into the sink full of water. You are standing on the ground, and since the can opener is wet there is a path from the hot wire inside the can opener through you to ground when you get it out of the sink. If the electricity flows from hot to ground through you, it could be fatal. The GFCI can sense the current flowing through you because not all of the current is flowing from hot to neutral as it expects -- some of it is flowing through you to ground. As soon as the GFCI senses that, it trips the circuit and cuts off the electricity.