

Food and Water in an Emergency

If an earthquake, hurricane, winter storm or other disaster strikes your community, you might not have access to food, water and electricity for days, or even weeks. By taking some time now to store emergency food and water supplies, you can provide for your entire family. This was developed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency in cooperation with the American Red Cross and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Having an ample supply of clean water is a top priority in an emergency. A normally active person needs to drink at least two quarts of water each day. Hot environments can double that amount. Children, nursing mothers and ill people will need even more. You will also need water for food preparation and hygiene. Store a total of at least one gallon per person, per day. You should store at least a two-week supply of water for each member of your family.

If supplies run low, never ration water. Drink the amount you need today, and try to find more for tomorrow. You can minimize the amount of water your body needs by reducing activity and staying cool.

Hidden Water Sources in Your Home

If a disaster catches you without a stored supply of clean water, you can use the water in your hot-water tank, pipes and ice cubes. As a last resort, you can use water in the reservoir tank of your toilet (not the bowl).

Do you know the location of your incoming water valve? You'll need to shut it off to stop contaminated water from entering your home if you hear reports of broken water or sewage lines.

To use the water in your pipes, let air into the plumbing by turning on the faucet in your house at the highest level. A small amount of water will trickle out. Then obtain water from the lowest faucet in the house.

To use the water in your hot-water tank, be sure the electricity or gas is off, and open the drain at the bottom of the tank. Start the water flowing by turning off the water intake valve and turning on a hot-water faucet. Do not turn on the gas or electricity when the tank is empty.

When Food Supplies Are Low

If activity is reduced, healthy people can survive on half their usual food intake for an extended period and without any food for many days. Food, unlike water, may be rationed safely, except for children and pregnant women.

If your Water supply is limited, try to avoid foods that are high in fat and protein, and don't stock salty foods, since they will make you thirsty. Try to eat salt-free crackers, whole grain cereals and canned foods with high liquid content.

You don't need to go out and buy unfamiliar foods to prepare an emergency food supply. You can use the canned foods, dry mixes and other staples on your cupboard shelves. In fact, familiar foods are important. They can lift morale and give a feeling of security in time of stress. Also, canned foods won't require cooking, water or special preparation. Following are recommended short-term food storage plans.

Special Considerations

As you stock food, take into account your family's unique needs and tastes. Try to include foods that they will enjoy and that are also high in calories and nutrition. Foods that require no refrigeration, preparation or cooking are best.

Individuals with special diets and allergies will need particular attention, as will babies, toddlers and elderly people. Nursing mothers may need liquid formula, in case they are unable to nurse. Canned dietetic foods, juices and soups may be helpful for ill or elderly people.

Make sure you have a manual can opener and disposable utensils. And don't forget nonperishable foods for you pets.

How to Cook if the Power Goes Out

For emergency cooking you can use a fireplace, or a charcoal grill or camp stove can be used outdoors. You can also heat food with candle warmers, chafing dishes and fondue pots. Canned food can be eaten right out of the can. If you heat it in the can, be sure to open the can and remove the label first.

Three Ways to Purify Water

In addition to having a bad odor and taste, contaminated water can contain microorganisms that cause diseases such as dysentery, typhoid and hepatitis. You should purify all water of uncertain purity before using it for drinking, food preparation or hygiene.

There are many ways to purify water. None is perfect. Often the best solution is a combination of methods.

Two easy purification methods are outlined below. These measures will kill most microbes but will not remove other contaminants such as heavy metals, salts and most other chemicals. Before purifying, let any suspended particles settle to the bottom, or strain them through layers of paper towel or clean cloth.

Boiling

Boiling is the safest method of purifying water. Bring water to a rolling boil for 3-5 minutes, keeping in mind that some water will evaporate. Let the water cool before drinking.

Boiled water will taste better if you put oxygen back into it by pouring the water back and forth between two clean containers. This will also improve the taste of stored water.

Disinfection

You can use household liquid bleach to kill microorganisms. Use only regular household liquid bleach that contains 5.25 percent sodium hypochlorite. Do not use scented bleaches, color safe bleaches or bleaches with added cleaners.

Add 16 drops of bleach per gallon of water, stir and let stand for 30 minutes. If the water does not have a slight bleach odor, repeat the dosage and let stand another 15 minutes.

The only agent used to purify water should be household liquid bleach. Other chemicals, such as iodine or water treatment products sold in camping or surplus stores that do not contain 5.25 percent sodium hypochlorite as the only active ingredient, are not recommended and should not be used.

While the two methods described above will kill most microbes in water, distillation will remove microbes that resist these methods, and heavy metals, salts and most other chemicals.

Distillation

Distillation involves boiling water and then collecting the vapor that condenses back to water. The condensed vapor will not include salt and other impurities. To distill, fill a pot halfway with water. Tie a cup to the handle on the [pot's lid so that the cup will hang right-side-up when the lid is upside-down (make sure the cup is not dangling into the water) and boil the water for 20 minutes. The water that drips from the lid into the cup is distilled.

Supplies

It's 2:00 a.m. and a flash flood forces you to evacuate your home – fast. There's no time to gather food from the kitchen, fill bottles with water, grab a first aid kit from the closet and snatch a flashlight and a portable radio from the bedroom. You need to have these items packed and ready in one place before disaster strikes.

Pack at least a three-day supply of food and water, and store it in a handy place. Choose foods that are easy to carry, nutritious and ready-to-eat. In addition, pack these emergency items:

Medical supplies and first aid manual	Hygiene supplies
Money and matches in a waterproof container	Fire extinguisher
Portable radio, flashlights and extra batteries	Blanket and extra clothing
Shovel and other useful tools	Infant/small child's needs
Household liquid bleach to purify water	Manual can opener

If the Electricity Goes Off ...

First, use perishable food and foods from the refrigerator.

Then, use the foods from the freezer. To minimize the number of times you open the freezer door, post a list of freezer contents on it. In a well-filled, well-insulated freezer, foods will usually still have ice crystals in their centers (meaning foods are safe to eat) for at least three days.

Finally, begin to use non-perishable foods and staples.

Water

How to store water

Store your water in thoroughly washed plastic, glass, fiberglass or enamel-lined metal containers. Never use a container that has held toxic substances. Plastic containers, such as soft drink bottles, are best. You can also purchase food-grade plastic buckets or drums.

Seal water containers tightly, label them and store in a cool, dark place. Rotate water every six months.

Emergency Outdoor Water Sources

If you need to find water outside your home, you can use these sources. Be sure to purify the water according to the instructions under purifying water before drinking it.

Rainwater	Streams, rivers and other moving bodies of water
Ponds and lakes	Natural springs

Avoid water with floating material, an odor or dark color. Use saltwater only if you distill it first. You should not drink flood water.

Food

Short-Term Food Supplies

Even though it is unlikely that an emergency would cut off your food supply for two weeks, you should prepare a supply that will last that long.

The easiest way to develop a two-week stockpile is to increase the amount of basic foods you normally keep on your shelves.

Storage Tips

- * Keep food in a dry, cool spot – a dark area if possible.
- * Keep food covered at all times.
- * Open food boxes or cans carefully so that you can close them tightly after each use.
- * Wrap cookies and crackers in plastic bags and keep them in tight containers.
- * Empty opened packages of sugar, dried fruits and nuts into screw-top jars or air-tight cans to protect them from pests.
- * Inspect all food for signs of spoilage before use.
- * Use foods before they go bad, and replace them with fresh supplies, dated with ink or marker. Place new items at the back of the storage area and older ones in front.

Nutrition Tips

During and right after a disaster, it will be vital that you maintain your strength. So remember ...

- * Eat at least one well-balanced meal each day.
- * Drink enough liquid to enable your body to function properly (two quarts a day).
- * Take in enough calories to enable you to do any necessary work.

* Include vitamin, mineral and protein supplements in your stockpile to assure adequate nutrition.

Shelf-life of Foods for Storage

Here are some general guidelines for rotating common emergency foods.

*Use within six months:

- Powdered milk (boxed)
- Dried fruit (in metal container)
- Potatoes

* Use within one year:

- Canned condensed meat and vegetable soups
- Canned fruits, fruit juices and vegetables
- Read-to-eat cereals and uncooked instant cereals (in meat containers)
- Peanut butter
- Jelly
- Hard candy and canned nuts
- Vitamin C

* May be stored indefinitely (in proper containers and conditions)

- Wheat
- Vegetable oils
- Dried corn
- Baking powder
- Soybeans
- Instant coffee, tea and cocoa
- Salt
- Noncarbonated soft drinks
- White rice
- Bouillon products
- Dry pasta
- Powdered milk (in nitrogen-packed cans)