

Disaster Relief

Emergency Food and Water



After a disaster, some people may not have food and water for days and perhaps even weeks. Preparing and keeping a food and water emergency kit can prevent a difficult situation from becoming a life-threatening one.

Emergency Foods

Things to Think About

- What foods are nonperishable and do not need cooking and refrigeration?
- What foods are simple and easy to prepare?
- What foods are rich in both calories and protein to help build and maintain energy?
- What foods appeal to family members?
- What foods meet any special dietary need my family may have, including infants, toddlers, diabetics, and elderly family members?

Food Options to Consider

- Compressed food bars. They store well, are lightweight, taste good, are nutritious, and are high in calories.
- Trail mix. Blends of granola, nuts, seeds, and dried fruits are available prepackaged, or you can choose to assemble your own.
- Dried foods. Dried foods are nutritious and satisfying, but they may also have a lot of salt, which may make you thirsty. Avoid these if fresh water is scarce.
- Freeze-dried foods. Freeze-dried foods are tasty and lightweight but need water for reconstitution. If water is scarce, these foods may not be the best option.
- Instant meals. Instant meals such as cups of noodles, soups, or oatmeal are also a good addition to kits, although they also need water.
- Snack-sized ready-to-eat canned meats, fruits, and vegetables. Snack-sized canned goods are good because they usually have pull-top lids or twist-open keys and leave only a little waste.
- Prepackaged beverages. Beverages packaged in foil packets and foil-lined boxes are suitable for disaster supply kits because they are tightly sealed and can be stored for a long time.

Food Options to Avoid

- Commercially dehydrated foods. Commercially dehydrated foods require a great deal of water and require extra effort in preparation. You can't eat them unless you add water.
- Bottled foods. Bottled foods are too heavy and bulky and break easily.
- Meal-sized canned foods. Meal-sized commercially canned foods are also bulky and heavy.
- Whole grains, beans, and pasta. Preparing these foods could be complicated in a disaster.

Buying Foods

Most of the foods appropriate for a disaster supply kit are available at local supermarkets. Specialty food stores such as health-food stores or food-storage supply houses, as well as sporting goods stores, may have foods prepared especially for disaster relief kits.

Food Storage Tips

- Keep food in the driest and coolest spot in the house—in a dark area if possible.
- Keep food covered at all times.
- Seal cookies and crackers in plastic bags, and keep in tight containers.
- Open food boxes and cans carefully so you can close them tightly after each use.
- Store packages susceptible to pests, such as opened packages of sugar, dried fruits, and nuts, in screw-top jars or airtight cans.
- Store wheat, corn, and beans in sealed cans or sealed plastic buckets.
- Buy powdered milk in nitrogen-packed cans for long-term storage.
- Keep salt and vitamins in their original packages.
- Inspect all items periodically to make sure there are no broken seals, dented containers, or insect infestations.

Emergency Cooking

In an emergency, you can cook food using a fireplace. If you are using a charcoal grill or camp stove, you should cook outside for safety reasons. You can also heat food with candle warmers, chafing dishes, and fondue pots.

You can prepare canned foods and eat them directly out of the can. Completely remove the lid and label before heating the can to prevent internal combustion or the label's catching fire.

Emergency Water

Plan to store a 3-day supply of water for each family member. The needs of each person differ, depending upon age, physical condition, activity, diet, and climate. An active person needs to drink at least 2 quarts of water daily. Children, nursing mothers, and ill people often need more water.

More water is necessary for food preparation and hygiene, so consider these needs, as well. Plan to store at least 2 gallons per person per day.

Store water in clean, sanitary containers. Plastic containers are good because they are lightweight and unbreakable. Glass containers are nonpermeable, but they are breakable and heavy. Think of metal containers as a last resort because they may corrode and tend to give water a bad taste.

Purifying Contaminated Water

Besides having a bad smell and taste, contaminated water can cause diseases such as dysentery, cholera, typhoid, and hepatitis, which can make you very sick. It is important to purify water if you're uncertain about how safe it is. The best way to purify water is to boil it for 10 minutes and then let the water cool before drinking. Boiling is the safest and surest way to purify water.

Purifying Agents

You can also use household bleach to kill microorganisms. Your emergency food and water supply should include liquid chlorine bleach that is stored at room temperature and less than a year old. The liquid chlorine

bleach should state on the package that it contains 8.25 percent of sodium hypochlorite and that the product is suitable for disinfection and sanitation as stated on the label. Do not use scented bleaches, color-safe bleaches, or bleaches with added cleaners. If water is cloudy, let settle and filter it through a clean cloth, paper towel, or coffee filter. Add six drops of bleach per gallon of water, stir, and let stand for 30 minutes. Double the amount of bleach if the water is cloudy, colored, or cold. If the water does not have a slight odor, repeat the dosage and let stand for another 15 minutes before use. If the chlorine taste is too strong, pour water from one clean container to another and let it stand a few hours before use. (Purification tablets and iodine are not effective purifying agents and are no longer recommended by the U.S. Department of Agriculture or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.)

General Tips

- Put your emergency kit together with the idea of providing each family member at least one well-balanced meal per day.
- Change the food supplies every 6 months to help keep the items fresh.
- A nonelectric can opener and utensils you can throw away are essential additions to the kit.
- Include only dry food for pets.
- Store food with enough calories to provide enough energy to keep the strength to work.
- Include a vitamin and mineral supplement or multi-vitamin in your stockpile to ensure adequate nutrition.
- By reducing activity and staying cool, you can lessen the amount of water a body requires.
- Prepare for your family pets, too. Prepare a kit of sealed dry food, water, feces bags, and any toys.

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