

IN THE KNOW ABOUT NUTRITION

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Preparing for the Unexpected: What to do when Disaster Strikes!



Being prepared for the unexpected is very important. We never expect it, but the truth is that we really do not know when disaster might happen to us. Things such as fires, floods, tornados, or ice storms could happen at any time, and failing to prepare is preparing to fail! Being ready for disasters is not only smart, it could very well save your life.

Be Prepared

It is important to create a plan for your individual needs. Communicate with family members or roommates to assure that all of you are on the same page in case something happens. A few helpful things to discuss include establishing quick escape routes in case of emergency, packing individual disaster supply kits, and adding the letters “ICE” behind the name of any emergency contacts in any cell phones. “ICE” stands for “in case of emergency,” and it allows anyone to be able to make emergency contact on your behalf!

The Disaster Supply Kit

A disaster supply kit is a collection of basic necessities that members of a household could need during/immediately after a disaster. These kits are easy to quickly grab, and contain items to help individuals survive for at least 3 days. Disaster supply kits should be stored in air tight containers to keep out bugs and moisture. Some items to include are:

- **Food** - Choose foods that require no preparation or refrigeration - simply open and eat! Good foods to include are protein bars, granola bars, crackers, nuts and nut butters, canned fruit, canned soups, evaporated or canned milk, ready to eat cereals, and smoked or dried meats.

- **Water** - Pack 1 gallon of water per person, per day, and include enough water for 3 days. Safe drinking water is essential to survival! You may need more than this amount during the summer months or for ill individuals, pregnant women, and children. Buy bottled water or store tap water in water bottles until time for consumption.
- **First Aid Kit** - A standard first aid kit with bandages, sterile gauze, extra medications, etc.
- **Extra Clothing** - Keep one change of clothes, one extra pair of shoes, and one blanket per person.
- **Emergency Items** - Battery powered radio, flashlight, extra batteries, a whistle, a small shovel, basic tools, baby wipes, and toilet paper are all good to have. It is also a good idea to keep an extra pair of glasses or contacts if necessary and a list of medications/other important information such as insurance or financial.
- Rotate items out a couple of times per year to insure the “use by” dates have not expired.

Food Safety

Our food can become unsafe after a flood, fire, tornado, other disaster or the loss of power from high winds, snow or ice. Here is how to minimize the potential loss of food and reduced the risk of foodborne illness.

ABCD's of keeping food safe in an emergency

Always keep meat, poultry, fish, and eggs refrigerated at or below 40 degrees F and frozen food at or below 0 degrees F.

Be prepared for an emergency by having items on hand that do not require refrigeration and can be eaten cold or heated on the outdoor grill. Store the following items in an emergency kit: nonperishable foods, ready-to-use baby formula, pet food, and a hand-operated can opener.

Consider what you can do ahead of time to store your food safely in an emergency. Keep coolers and frozen gel packs on hand to help keep food cold if the power will be out for more than 4 hours. If you live in a flood-prone area, store your food on shelves that will be safely away from contaminated water.

Digital, dial or instant-read food thermometers and appliance thermometers will help you know if the food is at safe temperatures. Keep thermometers in the refrigerator and freezer at all times.

For a fact sheet from the U.S. Department of Agriculture on when to save food and when to throw it out, visit.

<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics>

Deciding to stay or go

You may be faced with the decision to evacuate or shelter-in-place. Evacuation means moving from an unsafe place to a safe place in a hurry. Sheltering-in-place is staying exactly where you are during a disaster; it may be at home, school, work or a friend's house.

Take the following into consideration when making your decision:

- Listen for directions from local authorities.
- Use common sense.
- Monitor TV or radio news reports.

Evacuation: If local officials ask you to evacuate, do so immediately. The authorities will not ask you to leave unless they determine that lives may be in danger.

If you do not own or drive a car, you will need to make other arrangements for transportation. Ask your local emergency management office about the types of public transportation available.

A few things to know before an evacuation:

- Evacuate immediately if told to do so by authorities.
- Listen to a local radio or TV station and follow the instructions of local emergency officials.
- Wear long pants, a long-sleeved shirt and sturdy shoes.
- Take your pets with you when you leave.
- Grab your disaster supplies kit.
- Use the travel routes specified by local authorities.

Sheltering-in-place: Some conditions may require that you shelter-in-place, or seek protection in your home, place of employment, school or wherever you are when the disaster occurs.

The directions for sheltering-in-place depend strictly on the type of emergency situation. Listen to local officials on how to shelter-in-place and remain there until they tell you that it is safe to leave. Here are a few incidents that require sheltering in place:

- **Tornado warning:** Go to an interior, underground or wind-safe room without windows.
- **Chemical attack:** If possible, take shelter on an upper floor in an interior space without windows and seal the space using plastic sheeting and duct tape. If you do not have a second floor, choose a room with few or no windows and a limited number of doors. Access to a bathroom is desirable.
- **Nuclear attack:** If possible, take shelter below ground in an interior space without windows. If you do not have such a shelter, listen to authorities for the next best option.

Listen to and obey officials

- Listen to public health officials via local radio and/or local television news stations.
- If the authorities tell you to evacuate immediately, grab the essentials and go.
- Take enough supplies to be able to take care of yourselves without outside help for at least 3 days (disaster supplies kit).
- Shelter-in-place until authorities say you can leave.

Source: Talking About Disaster: Guide for Standard Messages, produced by the National Disaster Education Coalition, Washington, D.C. For more information, visit www.disastereducation.org and click on Disaster Guide.

Source : Preparing for the Unexpected, Texas Extension Disaster Education Network For more information, visit: Texas EDEN at <http://texashelp.tamu.edu>