

Food



THE GOAL: Have an emergency food supply that will meet the needs of your household for three days without outside help.

An emergency food supply doesn't have to sit on a shelf, ready for disaster to strike (although it can). It can be part of the food you use every day. The key to a good food storage plan is to buy ahead of time. Replace items before they run out. Buy items when they are on sale. A large duffel bag or plastic tub with a lid makes a great storage place for an emergency food supply. Make sure your family, including pets, will have what they need when disaster strikes.

▶▶▶ CHOOSE ONE OF THE FOLLOWING THINGS TO DO THIS MONTH TO BECOME BETTER PREPARED:

Buy a three-day emergency food supply for your household.

Put aside a three-day supply of food for disasters. You probably have a better idea than anyone else how much food you and your family members would need for three days. Follow the BUS rule to help you. BUS stands for balance, usability, and shelf-life.

1. BALANCE

You may already buy food that provides a balanced diet for your family. A balanced diet includes a variety of foods from each of the basic food groups. This is especially important for people with certain health conditions. Also include high energy foods (such as nuts and protein bars) and comfort foods (such as graham crackers or chocolate).

2. USABILITY

Choose items that don't need to be cooled, heated, or need a lot of water. Examples include canned or dried meat, dry cereal, and canned vegetables. Make sure you have a manual can opener if you plan to use canned goods.

3. SHELF LIFE

Look at the expiration date listed on the food item. Use and replace foods before the expiration date.

Take steps to make sure food in your refrigerator and freezer will stay safe.

During an extended power outage, temperatures in your fridge and freezer will begin to rise, even if the doors stay closed. As the temperature rises, harmful bacteria may begin to grow on your food.

If the temperature in your fridge stays above 41 degrees Fahrenheit for more than four hours, perishable food items (milk, lunch meat, mayonnaise based salads, poultry items, leftovers, etc.) may be unsafe to eat.

If the temperature in your freezer stays above 41 degrees Fahrenheit for more than one to two days, food may be unsafe to eat. Food that still contains ice crystals should be safe. Always check the color and odor of food, particularly meat when it is thawed. If it is questionable throw it out (make sure it is discarded where animals can't get to it).

TAKE STEPS NOW TO MAKE SURE YOUR PERISHABLE FOOD REMAINS AS SAFE AS POSSIBLE:

- Install a thermometer in your fridge and freezer.
- If you anticipate a power outage, such as a winter storm, reduce the temperature of your fridge and freezer. The colder your food is the more time it takes to thaw.
- Keep containers of ice in your freezer to keep the temperature down.

WHEN THE POWER GOES OUT:

- Cover the fridge or freezer in newspapers and blankets. Keep vents clear in case the freezer starts operating again.
- Avoid opening the door to the fridge or freezer.
- Use dry ice, if available. Identify a source for dry ice in advance and remember that if the power outage is widespread, there may be a lot of competition for this resource.

If you don't know the temperature of your fridge or if the fridge was off for more than four hours, the food should be discarded. Eating perishable food that has not been kept cold can cause food poisoning, even if it is refrozen or cooked. When in doubt, throw it out!

Make sure you can meet any special dietary needs in your household.

Some people are on special diets for health reasons. There can be serious effects if the right food is not available during a disaster. If you use special equipment, like a blender, food scale, or feeding tubes, make sure you take those with you. Think about keeping extra equipment at a friend or relative's home in case you have to evacuate.

Talk to your healthcare provider or a nutritionist about nonperishable menu options that can be used if you can't get to a grocery store, or that can be prepared at an emergency shelter. Keep a description of your medical condition and the diet in your emergency kit.