

Storing Food for Short-Term Emergencies



Planning ahead for situations when you may need an emergency food supply is a good idea. How much and which foods to store will depend on the members of your household, your preferences, special health conditions, ability to use the food in an emergency, space for storage, and how far you live from a market. Planning for short-term emergency food needs may be as simple as increasing the quantities of some staple foods and nonperishable foods that you normally have on hand.

Preparing a Three-Day Emergency Food Supply

A three-day emergency food supply should be sufficient for most situations. In addition to your short-term food supply, store water personal hygiene items, flashlights, blankets and other supplies for emergency use. The food supply needs to be non-perishable; select foods that require no refrigeration, minimal or no preparation or cooking, and little or no water. Try to select foods that are compact and lightweight.

Include the following foods:

- Ready-to-eat canned meats, fruits and vegetables
- Soups--canned or dried
- Smoked or dried meats like beef jerky
- Dried fruit
- Juices--canned or powdered
- Milk--powdered, canned or shelf-stable brick pack
- Staples--sugar, salt, pepper, instant potatoes and rice, coffee, tea, ocoa
- Ready-to-eat cereals, instant hot cereals, crackers
- High energy foods--peanut butter, jelly, nuts, trail mix, granola bars
- Cookies, candy, other snacks
- Foods for infants, elderly persons or those with special diet needs

Gathering and Storing your Emergency Food Supply

It is important to store foods your household normally eats, plus some favorite treats. Each household requires different amounts of food, based on the individual needs of the household members. Choose quantities of food based on the needs of your household. Don't forget to store animal food for pets.

Avoid stocking foods high in salt that will increase thirst. Store single servings or one-mean sizes to avoid leftovers, since refrigeration may not be available. Canned foods keep almost indefinitely as long as cans are undamaged. However, for the best quality and nutritional value, replace canned goods every year. Use the older canned goods in cooking and buy new items for the emergency stockpile. Finally, store emergency food and supplies where they will be safe from insect and rodent pests, and possible flooding.

Other Items to Store

Complete your emergency food supply kit by including the following items:

- Water (see Fact Sheet: Storing Water for Short-Term Emergencies)
- Chlorine bleach, one gallon of 5.25% sodium hypochlorite
- Disposable plates, cups, tableware, plastic bags
- Can opener, other utensils, paper towels, packaged hand wipes
- Covered two-quart saucepan
- Canned heat burner and extra fuel
- Charcoal for outdoor cooking
- First aid kit
- Flashlight and extra batteries, candles
- Matches in a waterproof container
- Radio with batteries
- Personal items: clothes, personal hygiene supplies

Preparing a Two-Week Emergency Supply

The same general suggestions apply for a two-week emergency food supply. However, for two weeks or more of emergency eating it might be wise to pay more attention to nutrition needs than is necessary for short (three-day) survival conditions. Plan food supplies so that at least one well-balanced meal could be eaten each day. One way to develop a two-week emergency supply is to increase the amount of basic foods you normally keep on your shelves. Keep the supply fresh by rotating non-perishable staple items in storage.

To help you plan a two-week food supply, make a list of all family members, indicating any special dietary needs. List all staple foods in cupboards and freezer. Make a meal chart, indicating where food can be found each day. Add notes to each day's list that indicate how much water and what utensils are needed for preparation. Keep track of cooking directions for products such as rice, instant cereals, dry potatoes, and dry milk.

Dry Food Storage

Many dry food items (rice, wheat, flour, corn meal, etc.) Can be stored for extended periods of time. You may want to consider these items when planning your emergency food supply. Grains and other dry goods benefit from storage in a cool, dry location. Choose packaging that can be tightly sealed such as food storage bags, plastic containers with tight-fitting lids, and metal canisters. Store all dry goods in a cool location, away from sunlight and heat. Basements or pantries off the kitchen are often a good choice for food storage. Make sure the food storage area is free of insect and rodent infestation. Unopened dry and canned goods will keep for at least six months if properly stored. After one year, quality may begin to decline. Many canned and packaged foods require refrigeration once opened. This includes canned foods, salad dressings, condiments and jams and jellies. Remember to take this into account when planning your food supply. If kept for more than one day, opened canned goods should be transferred to glass or plastic storage containers to avoid a metallic taste in the food.