

# Do 1 Thing...Food

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Snowstorms can keep us in our homes for days. Power outages can close stores. Disease outbreaks may make public places dangerous. It is important for every household to be able to take care of itself without outside help for 72 hours.

**THE GOAL:** Have a food supply that will meet the needs of your household for three days without outside assistance.

## Do One Thing

- Purchase and store a dedicated three day emergency food supply for your household.
- Make a food storage plan that will meet your family's needs in a disaster (including pets).
- Take steps to make sure food in your refrigerator and freezer will stay cold in a power outage.

## Knowing & Meeting Your Family's Needs

An emergency food supply doesn't have to be tucked away in a safe location, ready for disaster to strike (although it can be). It can be sitting on the shelves of your cupboards every day, being used and replenished each time you go shopping.

The type and amount of food a person needs depends on many things: age, health, physical activity level, size, etc. It's important to get a balanced diet during a disaster, when your body may be experiencing greater than normal stress. (Disasters are a good time to avoid alcohol. It might seem to help during stressful times, but it is a depressant.)



## Food Storage Plan

The key to a good food storage plan is to buy early. By replacing items before you run out, you make sure that your family will have what they need when disaster strikes, and you do not end up buying any more often.

Use the BUS rule to plan for your family's needs during a disaster: Balance, Usability, and Shelf-Life.

1. **Balance:** Chances are you are already buying a balanced diet for your family. Make sure that all food groups are represented, whether you are using a food storage plan, or creating a dedicated disaster food supply. A balanced diet includes a variety of foods from each of the basic food groups.
2. **Usability:** When you shop, pick up items from each food group that would be usable in a disaster (canned or dried meat, dry cereal, canned vegetables—foods that don't need to be refrigerated or cooked, and that don't need a lot of water added) and can also be used for every day meals. Think about what food in your kitchen today could be prepared if you had no electricity and no ability to go to a store. Make sure you have a manual can opener if you are planning to use canned goods.
3. **Shelf Life:** The length of time that perishable foods will last is marked on the package. Whether you are storing a dedicated emergency food supply, or using a food storage plan, pay attention to shelf-life when purchasing and using food. Use and replace foods before the expiration date.

If you have a baby, or if someone in your family has special dietary needs, apply these rules to their food supply also. And do the same for your pets. Include comfort foods like graham crackers or chocolate (you may want to consider putting these away especially for an emergency).

*Don't forget your emergency water supply: 1 gallon per person per day, and a gallon for your pets!  
(See the February Do 1 Thing Factsheet)*

## Dedicated Emergency Food Supply

You may want to put aside a dedicated 3 day supply of food for emergencies. Consider doing this if your lifestyle keeps you from cooking for yourself on a regular basis.

You probably have a better idea than anyone else how much food you and your family members would need for three days. Make sure that all food groups are included in your emergency supply. Include high energy foods (such as nuts and protein bars) and comfort foods.

A large plastic tub with a lid makes an excellent storage place for an emergency food supply. It will keep foods fresh longer and will protect from the elements if your home is flooded or damaged. Make sure you keep track of the shelf-life of the food in your emergency supply and rotate it as needed.

### 72 Hour Food Supply for Pets

Don't forget pets when planning your emergency food supply. If you aren't sure how much food your pets will need for three days, use the manufacturer's guidelines on the back of the pet food package or ask your vet.

## Food Safety

If you don't have a refrigerator/freezer thermometer, get one. Knowing the highest temperature reached by your refrigerator and freezer while the power is out is the key to knowing whether or not your food is safe to eat.

During an extended power loss temperatures in your refrigerator and freezer will begin to rise, even if the door stays closed. As the temperature rises harmful bacteria will begin to grow quickly.

If the temperature in your refrigerator is above 41 degrees F for more than four hours, perishable food items (milk, lunchmeat, mayonnaise based salads, poultry items, leftovers, etc.) may be unsafe to eat.

If frozen food is above 41 degrees for more than one to two days, it may be unsafe. 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).

If you cannot verify the temperature of your refrigerator or if the refrigerator was off for more than four hours, perishable food items should be discarded.

Take steps now to make sure your perishable food remains as safe as possible:

- Install a refrigerator/freezer thermometer
- Make sure that refrigerator or freezer is not plugged into an outlet that is protected by a GFI device. Those devices are easily tripped and must be manually reset to restore power.
- If you anticipate a power outage for any reason (winter storms, construction in the area), reduce the temperature. The colder the food, the more time it takes to thaw.
- If your freezer is not full, store containers of ice in it to help keep the temperature down.

When the power goes out:

- Cover the refrigerator or freezer in newspaper and blankets (keep vents clear in case the freezer starts operating again).
- Avoid opening the door.
- Use dry ice if available (identify a source for dry ice in advance, remember that if the power outage is widespread, there may be a lot of competition for this resource).

Eating perishable food that has not been kept cold enough can cause food poisoning, even if it is refrozen or cooked. **When in doubt, throw it out!**

## For more information

<http://www.fema.gov/pdf/library/f&web.pdf>

<http://www.mypyramid.gov>

<http://www.do1thing.us>