

American Red Cross/Federal Emergency Management Agency

Food Supplies in Case of Disaster

How long can food supplies be stored?

To judge how long you can store food supplies, look for an “expiration date” or “best if used by” date on the product. If you can not find a date on the product, then the general recommendation is to store food products for six months and then replace them.

Some households find it helpful to pull food products for their regular meals from their disaster supplies kit and replace them immediately on an ongoing basis, so the food supplies are always fresh.

What kinds of food supplies are recommended to store in case of a disaster?

Try to avoid foods that are high in fat and protein, and don't stock salty foods, since they will make you thirsty. Familiar foods can lift morale and give a feeling of security in time of stress. Also, canned foods won't require cooking, water or special preparation. Take into account your family's unique needs and tastes. Try to include foods that they will enjoy and that are also high in calories and nutrition.

Store supplies of non-perishable foods and water in a handy place. You need to have these items packed and ready in case there is no time to gather food from the kitchen when disaster strikes. Sufficient supplies to last several days to a week are recommended.

Select foods that require no refrigeration, preparation or cooking, and little or no water. Foods that are compact and lightweight are easy to store and carry.

Try to eat salt-free crackers, whole grain cereals and canned food with high liquid content.

Recommended foods include:

- Ready-to-eat canned meats, fruits and vegetables. (Be sure to include a manual can opener)
- Canned juices, milk and soup (if powdered, store extra water).
- High energy foods, such as peanut butter, jelly, crackers, granola bars and trail mix.
- Comfort foods, such as hard candy, sweetened cereals, candy bars and cookies.
- Instant coffee, tea bags.
- Foods for infants, elderly persons or persons on special diets, if necessary.
- Compressed food bars. They store well, are lightweight, taste good and are nutritious.
- Trail mix. It is available as a prepackaged product or you can assemble it on your own.
- Dried foods. They can be nutritious and satisfying, but have some have a lot of salt content, which promotes thirst. Read the label.
- Freeze-dried foods. They are tasty and lightweight, but will need water for reconstitution.
- Instant Meals. Cups of noodles or cups of soup are a good addition, although they need water for reconstitution.
- Snack-sized canned goods. Good because they generally have pull-top lids or twist-open keys.
- Prepackaged beverages. Those in foil packets and foil-lined boxes are suitable because they are tightly sealed and will keep for a long time.

Food Options to Avoid:

- Commercially dehydrated foods. They can require a great deal of water for reconstitution and extra effort in preparation.
- Bottled foods. They are generally too heavy and bulky, and break easily.
- Meal-sized canned foods. They are usually bulky and heavy.
- Whole grains, beans, pasta. Preparation could be complicated under the circumstances of a disaster.
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What is the basis for the Red Cross recommendation to store supplies to last several days to a week? Red Cross recommendations to have food, water, and other emergency supplies on hand are not new, and are considered reasonable in case of any disaster. Our recommendations are to have supplies to last several days to a week. Most reasonable people would not consider such quantities of supplies as a "stockpile" or "hoarding."

Some families may choose to store supplies to last several weeks or more. Certainly, if they wish to do so, they may. It is always wise to have sufficient food and water supplies on hand in case access to such supplies may be disrupted by a disaster.

For more information, please contact your local Red Cross chapter. Ask for a copy of the following brochures: "Your Family Disaster Plan" (A4466); "Your Family Disaster Supplies Kit" (A4463) and "Food and Water in an Emergency" (A5055).