

Ask an Expert – Six Tips for Portable Emergency Food Storage

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Winter weather can regularly create emergency situations such as massive power outages, dangerous road conditions or flooding across the nation. In Utah, we are not without our share of emergency weather-caused situations that can leave people stranded, without heat or lights for several hours or stopped on the freeway due to a car accident.

While these situations can be frustrating at best, some can mean there will be no relief for up to 72 hours. How would you fare if you were home or in your car “stuck” with only what you have on hand to help you survive? Would you have sufficient supplies of food and water and a source of heat/warmth and other emergency items to last for 3 or more days?

If you are new to food storage and/or emergency preparedness, this question may be difficult to answer. However, even for those who think they are prepared, it's good to review some basics and examine what goes in a 72-hour emergency kit.

Below are six tips for preparing your portable emergency supply, adapted from USU's online publication, “A Guide to Food Storage for Emergencies.”

1) Foods to include in the 3-day/72-hour kit:

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA 2012), the general guidelines are to stock canned foods, dry mixes and other staples that do not require refrigeration, cooking, water or special preparation along with a manual can opener and eating utensils. Examples include:

- Ready-to-eat canned meats, fruits and vegetables

- Protein or fruit bars
- Dry cereal or granola
- Peanut butter
- Dried fruit
- Nuts, chips or crackers
- Food for infants
- Powdered drink mixes to add to water
- Comfort/stress foods, candy bars, etc.

2) Beverages to include in the 3-day/72-hour kit:

- Bottled water
- Soda or juices (Avoid diet sodas if possible since the artificial sweeteners break down and can cause an off flavor in soda stored beyond the expiration date. Regular soda will just taste flat.)
- Non-perishable pasteurized milk (Sold in cartons; does not require refrigeration.)

3) How to store the 3-day/72-hour supply kit:

In case you are home and need to evacuate on short notice, these supplies should be stored in a convenient location close to a front door or garage. Use one or two portable containers. Consider a tote on wheels with a handle, backpacks, etc., that are easy to move. Be sure they will fit in your car and that they can be carried or pulled to a safe location if you need to leave the car.

4) Amount of water to include:

The recommendation is 1 gallon of water per person (adult) per day. However, the requirement for staying hydrated varies according to age, physical condition, activity, diet and climate. Bottled water is the easiest to store; whether it is purchased in individual serving sizes or larger containers such as 3-liter jugs. Again, consider how you will carry this with you.

5) How to keep food cold or frozen at home:

If you experience a power outage that doesn't require you to leave your home, make certain perishable foods remain useable for as long as possible. If you have enough warning or have extra space in the freezer, fill empty spaces with bagged blocks of ice or fill clean plastic containers/jugs with water and freeze. Food in the freezer may not stay completely frozen but will stay cold for 1-2 days. Foods in the refrigerator may fare better if they can be transferred into insulated ice chests and covered with cubed ice.

6) How to maintain emergency food storage:

It is not only important to obtain a 72-hour supply of food and water, but also to store it safely and rotate the food to keep it appetizing and safe to eat.

- Keep the foods in a cool, dry place.
- Store in tightly closed plastic or metal containers to protect from pests and to extend shelf life.
- Throw out any canned goods that have become dented, show signs of corrosion or are bulging.
- Use foods by their expiration/freshness dates and replace as necessary.
- Rotate water storage annually.
- Re-evaluate your food and water storage needs annually as families expand or get smaller in numbers.

The initial expense of time and money to establish a 3-day emergency food supply may seem daunting. However, once established, you can reduce the sense of fear, knowing you are prepared and can keep your family nourished during an emergency situation.

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