

How to put together an “Emergency Supplies Kit”

In a major emergency covering a widespread area, such as prolonged severe weather, local responders may not be able to reach you immediately. They may need to focus their efforts elsewhere, this means that you may have to survive on your own for up to three days or more. This also means having your own water, food and emergency supplies. You may lose power, gas and or water and the toilets may not work. You may have to evacuate your home, office or school at a moment’s notice and take essentials with you. You probably won’t have the opportunity to shop or search for supplies you’ll need. Your household will cope best by preparing for disaster before it strikes. The following are a few useful tips on what you should store and how. With this checklist, you can put together your disaster kit based on the risks that you have identified.

- Try using plastic boxes or backpacks to keep the supplies together. The kit should be kept in a designated place.
- Make sure all household members know where the kit is kept.
- Make a list of all contents and put it outside the kit and/or in a prominent place in your home. Write all expiry dates on the list and when you will need to change them. Tinned food may last for some time, but bottled water, for example, will have to be replaced every six months. If you do not want to have the hassle of changing some foodstuffs every month, just replace the whole food side of the kit every six months and live off the replaced food for a few days. Throw away any tins that have become corroded, swollen or dented. Don’t eat any food past its sell-by date. Do not eat food that might have been in contact with floodwater.

If in doubt, throw it out!

A normally active person needs at least two litres of water daily just for drinking. Children, nursing mothers and ill people need more. Because you will need water for sanitary purposes and possibly cooking, you should store at least 2.5 litres of water per person per day

- Food items you might want to put into your Disaster Supply Kit are foods that you can readily eat without heating or water, such as ready-to-eat meats or tuna, fruits, vegetables, canned or boxed juices, UHT milk, soup, high energy food like crackers or cereal bars, vitamins, food for infants or persons on special diets, and also biscuits, boiled sweets, and powdered milk.
- Food, unlike water, may be rationed safely, except for children and pregnant women
- Keep tinned foods in a dry place where the temperature is fairly cool. To protect boxed food from pests, store food in tightly closed plastic or metal containers.
- Baby food (if appropriate).
- Pet food (if appropriate).

You should also consider the following medical items:

- First Aid kit including: first aid manual, sterile adhesive bandages in assorted sizes, cleansing agents and soap, thermometer and sunscreen.
- It may be difficult to obtain prescription medications during a disaster. Ask your GP or pharmacist about storing prescription medications. Be mindful of expiry dates. Keep a list of medication you and your family are on as part of your kit or plan.
- Have the following non-prescription medications in your disaster supply kit: pain relief tablets/preparations that you normally use (eg aspirin, paracetamol, ibuprofen) anti-diarrhoea medication, laxative, vitamins and medication for an upset stomach

Tools and other items you should have at hand

- A torch plus extra batteries or a wind-up torch
- A portable battery powered radio plus extra batteries, or a wind-up radio
- Matches in a waterproof, childproof container (keep away from children)
- Whistle!
- Fire extinguisher - make sure every member of the family knows how to use it
- Heavy duty gloves
- Needles and thread
- Manual can opener
- A safety knife
- If food must be cooked, small cooking stove and a can of cooking fuel
- Moistened towelettes, soap, hand sanitiser, liquid detergent
- Toothpaste, tooth brushes, shampoo, deodorants, hairbrush, feminine supplies
- Heavy duty plastic rubbish bags and ties - for personal sanitation uses - and toilet paper
- Medium sized plastic bucket with tight lid
- Disinfectant and household chlorine bleach
- Consider a small shovel for digging a latrine

Household documents and contact numbers

- Personal identification, cash and credit card
- Copies of important documents, such as birth certificates, marriage certificates, wills and deeds, insurance papers and immunisation records
- Store these in watertight containers
- Emergency contacts list
- Extra set of house and car keys

Special items

- One complete change of clothing and footwear (sturdy)
- Waterproof clothing, hat and gloves
- Sunglasses
- Blanket or sleeping bag for each member of the household
- Entertainment items eg Books and board games