

How to Store Food for Long Term Survival

By Contributor

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Setting aside a stash of food is a simple way to be prepared for emergencies. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) recommends storing enough food and water for three days, but survivalist experts often recommend setting aside provisions that will last you weeks to account for a worst-case scenario. Either way, the focus is on foods that provide a balance of nutrients, stay edible over the long run, and take up as little space as possible.

Planning

Locate your long-term emergency pantry in a cool, dry, dark area. Basements are great choices, as are large closets and garages (if temperature doesn't exceed 70-72 degrees).

Measure and note the exact size of your storage space. Before you can decide on what to store, you need to be realistic and determine exactly how much physical room you have to dedicate to food storage.

Layout the space for access. Plan where you'll put large stores of water, where you'll store cans, and where you'll store boxes or bins. Install shelving as necessary.

Selection

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Store water first. The human body can survive weeks without food, but can only go a few days without water. FEMA recommends setting aside a gallon per person, per day. This can take up a lot of space if you're creating a long-term stockpile. Limit the amount of water you need to set aside by stockpiling water purification tablets, a gallon of bleach, or a portable water purifier such as backpackers use.

Stock up on carbohydrates. In the event of a crisis, you'll get most of your calories through carbohydrates such as grains, pasta and rice. Look for bulk quantities. Carbohydrates should account for about 50 to 60 percent of the foods you put in long-term storage

Store canned meat and beans, which are excellent, long-lasting sources of protein. Protein bars are also useful sources for protein and other essential dietary needs. Expect protein sources to be about 25 percent of what you store.

Supplement with dried foods such as dried milk, powdered eggs, dehydrated fruits and vegetables, or dehydrated ready-to-eat meals. All are ideal space-saving long-term food items. Include dried beans as space allows, which take up less space than canned beans, but the tradeoff is that you'll have to use water to cook them.

Set aside salt, pepper, garlic powder and sweetener such as sugar or a sugar substitute. Include your favorite spices. Tasteless food can be demoralizing. Include olive or corn oil for cooking and flavoring food.

Box up basic food preparation tools and utensils to store with emergency food supplies. Make sure you have a can opener, eating utensils, and a cup. Also store a gel-fuel or butane stove with backups of cooking fuel.

Stocking

Place water in a large plastic drum with a pump, in 5-gallon buckets, in gallon jugs or individual bottles, whichever fits best into the space you have available.

Containerize loose bags of rice, dried beans or packets of dried or vacuum-sealed foods. Keep them safe from vermin and insects by putting them in plastic or metal bins with sealable lids.

Organize cans and jars on shelves, lined up by type with labels facing forward, for easy rotation.

Rotate out the foods in long-term storage regularly, as you buy new food. This will keep your long-term stores from spoiling.

Tip

Complete ready-to-eat meals are available from online sources and outdoor supply stores. These are more expensive than storing basic foodstuffs, but are simple, tasty, all-in-one solutions. These come in cans, vacuum-sealed pouches, or foil packs, and usually have shelf lives of more than a decade.

Take a shortcut in setting up your emergency food supply by ordering boxes of basic "emergency rations." These are packaged as individual servings meant only to provide basic nutrients and the calories necessary to survive a crisis, in one compact source. These are a quick alternative to planning and stocking a full-fledged long-term emergency food supply.

Warning

Food won't do you much good if you don't have crucial medication for chronic conditions. Store small supplies of essential medications along with your long-term emergency food supplies, rotating them out for newer drugs when you renew your prescriptions.

Don't store cans with deep, sharp-angled dents or large or deep dents near a seam. The dents may compromise the seal of the can, allowing the food to spoil.