

Disaster Relief

Preparing Food During a Power Failure

Cooking and eating habits must change to fit the situation during a power failure. You may have no heat, no refrigeration, and limited water. Health risks from contaminated or spoiled foods may increase. Follow these instructions when preparing food during a power outage.

Save Fuel

Choose foods that cook quickly if you have limited heat for cooking. Prepare casseroles and one-dish meals, or serve foods you don't have to cook.

Alternative cooking methods:

- Fireplace - You can cook on skewers. Wrap food in foil and place in the hot coals, cook on a wire grill over the flames. Or cook over the flames in heavy cookware, such as cast iron or heavy aluminum. A Dutch oven is probably the best piece of cookware, because you can use it to bake, boil, stew, or pan fry.
- Outdoor grills - You can cook on outdoor grills, but use the grills outside. Do not use them in closed areas, not even in a garage.
- Fuel-burning camp stoves or charcoal burners - Use these cookers outdoors only. Fumes from these can be deadly.
- Candle food warmers, chafing dishes, and fondue pots
- Wood-burning stoves

Save Water

Substitute liquids from canned vegetables for water in cooked dishes. Do not leave these unrefrigerated for more than two hours. Drain and save juices from canned fruits. Substitute these for water in salads and beverages.

Be Safe!

Boil (for at least 10 minutes) water used in food preparation.

If you are without refrigeration, open only enough food for one meal.

Do not leave cooked vegetables, meat, or meat dishes unrefrigerated for more than two hours, including preparation and serving time. Do not keep these dishes overnight without refrigeration. If there is snow, place covered foods in it.

Do not serve foods such as ground meats, creamed foods, meat salads, or custards. These foods spoil easily and can cause food borne illnesses. If necessary, substitute canned or powdered milk for fresh milk.

Canned milk is safe to use for two hours after you open the can. If you are using canned milk to feed a baby, open a fresh can for each bottle. Use only boiled or disinfected water to mix powdered milk. Use powdered milk immediately after it is mixed.

If safe water or water-disinfecting materials are not available, use canned or boiled fruit juices instead of water.

Prepare and eat foods in their original containers if possible. This helps if dish-washing facilities are limited.

Foods To Avoid

Avoid any of the following foods that have been without refrigeration for two hours or more:

- meat, poultry, seafood
- cooked vegetables
- foods made with cream sauces or mayonnaise
- cream cheese
- cottage cheese
- milk, custard, cream pie
- home-cooked vegetables unless you can boil them for 10 minutes after opening (20 minutes for spinach and corn)
- melted ice cream

Plan Ahead

Following are some quick-to-prepare canned foods that do not need to be cooked or refrigerated before opening. You can store all canned foods for up to one year without loss of quality. Freeze-dried and dehydrated items, if kept dry, can be stored indefinitely.

In addition to food, stock at least 10 gallons of drinking water — enough to reconstitute at least 4 quarts of dry milk per day for at least a week — and for other drinking purposes.

Nonperishable Canned Foods

*Main-Dish Items**

beef chili with beans
chicken a la king
chicken and dumplings
macaroni and cheese
pork and beans
pork luncheon loaf
potted meat
ravioli
refried beans
salmon
sardines
spaghetti and meatballs
tuna
Vienna sausage
chicken stew
corned beef
ham loaf

Fruits and Juices

applesauce
fruit cocktail
peaches
pears
pineapple
plums
fruit juices

*Vegetables**

beans, all types
blackeyed peas
carrots
corn
green peas
hominy
mixed vegetables
mustard greens
okra
sweet potatoes, yams
tomatoes, tomato juice
turnip greens
yellow squash
zucchini

Dehydrated Foods (you only have to add water or some form of reconstituted milk)

instant breakfast
instant chocolate drink powder
instant puddings
nonfat dry milk powder

Ready-To-Eat Foods

bottled hot sauce
bottled salad dressing
catsup
cheese spreads (in jars)
corn chips
cookies
crackers
dry cereals
evaporated milk
graham crackers
mustard
packaged taco shells
peanut butter
preserves
raisins
salt, pepper
tartar sauce
Spanish peanuts
sugar, honey
vinegar
Worcestershire sauce

*It is best to avoid home-canned vegetables, since you must bring these vegetables to a rolling boil, cover, and boil for 10 minutes before using (20 minutes for spinach and corn, 10 minutes for others).