

Emergency Food & Nutrition

Why Food Is Critical During Disasters

During disasters, your body and brain are under intense physical and emotional stress, which increases your need for energy. Whether you're evacuating, sheltering in place, or assisting others, food helps you:

- **Physical activity:** Carrying supplies, walking long distances
- **Mental focus:** Staying alert and making good decisions
- **Immune function:** Supporting recovery if you're sick or injured
- **Emotional balance:** Reducing panic, fatigue, and stress

Without adequate food, your energy drops, blood sugar crashes, and your ability to think clearly or act quickly is compromised—often when it matters most.

How Much Food Do You Need?

On average, here's how many calories people typically require each day:

- **Adult (moderate activity):** 2,000–2,500 kcal
- **Child (age 4–13):** 1,400–2,200 kcal
- **Teen (14–18):** 2,000–3,000 kcal
- **Elderly (sedentary):** ~1,600–2,000 kcal
- **Pregnant or lactating:** +300 to +500 kcal

Tip: In emergencies, calorie needs may increase by 10–30% due to physical and emotional stress. Plan to store at least 2,000–2,500 kcal per adult per day for 3–14 days depending on the situation.

Best Types of Emergency Foods for Energy

Choose foods that are high in energy, easy to store, and simple to prepare. Here are the best categories:

- **High-Energy Staples:** Rice, oats, pasta, granola, instant potatoes
- **Energy/Protein Bars:** Clif Bars, Kind Bars, RXBARs, BP-5 ration bars
- **Healthy Fats & Proteins:** Peanut butter, trail mix, canned tuna/chicken, nuts
- **Canned Meals & Beans:** Chili, lentils, stews, baked beans
- **Shelf-Stable Drinks:** UHT milk, protein shakes, electrolyte drinks

- **Quick Carbs & Comfort:** Dried fruit, hard candy, honey, chocolate

Smart Food Planning Tips

- **Balance nutrition:** Aim for 50–60% carbs, 20–30% fats, and 10–15% protein
- **Monitor shelf life:** Store food with a 6-month to 5-year life; rotate every 6–12 months
- **Digestive care:** Avoid heavy, high-fiber meals if under stress—opt for lighter, easier-to-digest foods
- **Boost morale:** Include small treats like chocolate or instant coffee
- **Customize:** Plan for allergies, medical needs, baby formula, pet food, or dietary restrictions

Did You Know?

- During Hurricane Katrina, many shelters ran short on calories and protein-rich food.
- After Hurricane Maria, many people suffered from dehydration and energy loss due to poor food access.
- Emergency agencies often provide 2,100 kcal/day rations (like BP-5 bars or MREs), but these may not suit everyone's needs or preferences.

Emergency food isn't just about avoiding hunger. It's about keeping your body strong, your mind clear, and your emotions stable when you need it most.