

*Are You Ready for an Emergency?*

# **Are You Ready for an Emergency?**

**How to take care of your family  
when disaster strikes.**

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## *Are You Ready for an Emergency?*

### **Why be prepared?**

Disasters are a very real occurrence that can happen anywhere in the world at anytime.

Experiencing a disaster is traumatic enough, having the extra disadvantage of being unprepared for such an event will ultimately result in more unnecessary stress in an already stressful situation.

There are many benefits in being prepared for an emergency situation.

Being prepared will aid in reducing the amount of fear, stress and anxiety that generally occurs during a situation. By being prepared and familiarizing yourself with procedures carried out during these situations you will ensure these feelings are minimized.

Increased amounts of stress and anxiety may result in a person being unable to respond correctly or effectively during a situation. If you cannot think and act appropriately, it is unlikely that you will be able to effectively take care of yourself and your family. By being prepared with the correct equipment, and by familiarizing yourself with characteristics, requirements and procedures during relevant forms of emergency situations, you will increase your chances of being able to react appropriately to such situations.

By being prepared and knowing ahead of time what may occur in certain situations, you may also successfully minimize the impact of a situation. For example, if you familiarize yourself with the characteristics of a cyclone, in the event that you find yourself in such a situation you will be able to secure objects and seek shelter, thus you will be able to successfully minimize the amount of damage incurred by the cyclone.

## *Are You Ready for an Emergency?*

### **How can I be prepared?**

There are many ways in which to effectively plan for an emergency situation in order to ensure you are well prepared for the event. Maximizing your level of organization will ultimately result in effectively responding to an emergency situation and will hopefully aid in decreasing the damage caused by a disaster.

To be prepared, you must firstly be aware of disasters that may occur in the state or country you reside in. Know danger and warning signs and be familiar with local procedures in the event of an emergency.

Being familiar with the types of disasters that may occur in your area will ensure sufficient knowledge with which to plan emergency procedures for the disasters relevant to you. It will also aid you in preparing a disaster supplies kit.

There are a few factors that may prove beneficial to know before disaster strikes.

Start by researching some of the disasters that may be relevant to the area in which you are living. You may find a significant amount of information online or alternatively you could contact the relevant weather bureau and ask if they could send you out appropriate information. Talk with neighbors and friends to obtain their opinion.

Once you have gained sufficient knowledge on any relevant disasters you may begin planning procedures for yourself and you family to follow. The following will provide you with some ideas on factors you should take into consideration when planning for a disaster:

***Escape routes:*** Trace your house or draw a floor plan in order to determine appropriate points of exit for different situations. Aim for two exits from each different room.

***Where to group:*** In the event of an emergency, each family member might find themselves exiting from a different room. To ensure everyone evacuates safely, designate an appropriate area for everyone to gather.

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## ***Are You Ready for an Emergency?***

***Communication:*** If disaster was to strike, ideally it would be during a time that the whole family is together; unfortunately this is not the case, so be prepared and organize a means of communication or designate a meeting place. Discuss how you will communicate in a variety of different situations.

***Existing Procedures:*** Also know any emergency procedures that may exist in your work place or in your children's school. This may help you organize a means of contact or a designated meeting area.

***Create a disaster supplies kit:*** This will ensure you are fully prepared in the event of a disaster and will prevent you from having to search around and obtain relevant items in the midst of a disaster, when you might not be thinking effectively due to the resultant stress and anxiety. Refer to chapter three for further information on how to make an emergency supplies kit and what items you will require.

***Know how to turn off the water or gas supply to your home.*** This might be useful in the event of an evacuation.

***Designating 'shelter' rooms:*** We often hear about people having to take shelter when we hear about disasters. Taking shelter may refer to shelter in one's home or shelter outside a particular area. It is always beneficial to plan ahead of time and designate 'safe' rooms in the house for a variety of situations. It is also wise to plan external forms of shelter (such as staying with a relative or in a hotel, etc) in the event that you are required to leave your home.

***Insurance:*** Ensure you purchase relevant insurance with which to provide a means of replacing your possessions if a disaster should cause damage to your home or contents. For insurance purposes, make an inventory of the possessions you own; writing a list and taking pictures or video are the most effective means of doing so. It may also be beneficial to purchase health and life insurance.

***Storage of important documentation:*** Ensure all important documentation is stored in a safe place away from the home (e.g. in a safe deposit box). If you are going to store the contents in

## ***Are You Ready for an Emergency?***

your home, look at purchasing a fire proof safe. Be sure to put any documents inside the safe into plastic baggies in the event of a flood.

***Make a Plan for Pets:*** If you have pets, it is advisable to make plans for their care in the event of a disaster. Ensure you have the necessary equipment and supplies for your pet such as food, water and an identification tag. It is also advisable to ensure your pets medical records are up to date (keep a copy of these if possible), and that your pet has undergone all relevant immunizations or vaccinations. For specific advice relating to the area you live in, contact your local animal shelter or emergency department.

***Learn First Aid:*** In order to be fully prepared for any situation in which a disaster may occur, it is always a good idea to complete a first aid course.

## *Are You Ready for an Emergency?*

### **Making a disaster supply kit.**

Assembling a disaster supply kit is an effective way to ensure you are prepared and organized in the event of a disaster.

In the event that a disaster does occur, you may find you are required to survive without the help of everyday comforts such as electricity or running water. Preparing for such a circumstance ahead of time is imperative.

When assembling your disaster supply kit, start by packing the basics. The following is a list of appropriate items to be packed in a disaster supply kit:

#### ***Food and Water:***

In the event that you are unable to obtain food or water from external sources during a disaster, be prepared. Have enough food and water on hand to last each member of the family for at least three days. Depending on the type of disaster you are planning for, you may like to store enough food for up to two weeks.

The most reliable way of storing water in your disaster supply kit will be to purchase commercially bottled water, as this will provide a safe form of drinking water in the event of a disaster. Current recommendations for water intake stand at approximately two liters of water per day per person. Take this into account when preparing your disaster supply kit, to ensure you store enough water for all members of the family.

Whilst commercially bottled water is the safest way of storing water for an emergency, there are other methods that may be applied. You may choose to prepare your own bottles of water. If this is the case try to purchase appropriate containers from a camping supplies store and be sure to clean these thoroughly. If you will be selecting your own containers, aim for bottles that previously held soft drinks. Do not use milk or juice containers as these contain protein and sugar residue that may result in the growth of harmful bacteria in your water stores. Again, be sure to clean the containers thoroughly.

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## ***Are You Ready for an Emergency?***

Once you have obtained and cleaned your containers, fill them with water and seal the lid tightly.

When you are packing food supplies for the family, avoid foods high in salt (as these will make you thirsty and want to drink more). Ensure you select canned or dry foods that do not require refrigeration. If canned foods are included in your kit, ensure you pack a can opener!

If a member of your family has special food requirements, ensure you take this into account and include appropriate food for them.

### ***Torch with extra Batteries:***

Remember, in the event of a disaster you may be required to fend for yourself without the luxuries of everyday life, including electricity. Be prepared by having a torch or some form of lighting device ready.

### ***Portable, Battery-operated television or radio:***

Packing one of these items will enable you stay up-to date with the current situation and procedures being carried out. Ensure these items are battery powered so as not to rely on electricity.

### ***First Aid Kit:***

A first aid kit is imperative in any disaster supply kit. Along with any minor injuries, in the event of something more extreme you may find yourself unable to make it to a hospital or that hospital services are 'backed up' if a disaster strikes. Ensure you have packed a first aid kit to tide you over until you are able to attend a hospital.

### ***Sanitary Items:***

These may include toilet paper, paper towels, baby wipes or any other form of sanitary product you think may be required.

### ***Kitchen/ Cooking utensils:***

In the event of an evacuation you may require utensils with which to cook. Pack the basics, such as a saucepan, a frying pan and a few

## ***Are You Ready for an Emergency?***

spoons etc. Do not go overboard and pack the kitchen sink. Remember, you may be required to carry your disaster supply kit. If you have some sort of portable cooking device it may be worthwhile packing this as well. Suitable cooking devices may include candle warmers, fondue sets (for indoor use) or camp stoves (for outdoor use) Along with the cooking items, pack a box of matches in a watertight container. These may be helpful in any situation.

### ***Photocopies of all Identification:***

Pack these in case all original documentation is lost.

### ***Extra clothes and blankets:***

The climate in which you live will ultimately determine the type of clothing you pack. Pack sufficient clothing to last a few days. You will be grateful for doing so in the event of an evacuation.

### ***Money:***

Be prepared and have some money on hand. In the event of an emergency, ATM machines or credit card facilities may no longer be available.

### ***Relevant Medications:***

If you or anyone else in your family suffers from a medical condition, ensure you pack a sufficient amount of relevant medications or medical equipment, as it may not be possible to obtain these in the event of a disaster. Ensure you regularly check the used by date of medications included in the disaster supplies kit.

The above list is a very basic guide to follow to ensure a well equipped disaster supplies kit. Every family is different and will have individual needs. Be sure to take these into account to personalize your disaster supplies kit. As your family grows and changes, remember to update the kit to allow it to cater for you families requirements.

## ***Are You Ready for an Emergency?***

Once you have developed a disaster supplies kit it is important to maintain it. Keep it stored and sealed in an environment in which food remains cool and dry, to maximize the life of the dried or canned foods. Remember to regularly check the items in your disaster supplies kit and dispose of any canned foods that are dented, and any foods that exceed their used by date. It is recommended that all food and water be replaced every six months.

As you dispose of items, be sure to replenish them.

## *Are You Ready for an Emergency?*

### **Types of disasters that may occur and how to deal with them**

There are many different types of disasters that may occur. Whilst a disaster can happen anywhere, some areas are more prone to a particular type of disaster than others. This chapter provides a list of the more common disasters that happen in most places and how you can effectively deal with them.

**Floods:** Characterized by increasingly rising water levels, generally do to heavy storm activity. Floods can happen just about anywhere in the world. If you feel a flood is likely to occur where you are living, ensure you stay up to date on the current situation by monitoring news reports on the television or radio.

If you must venture out in the midst of a severe storm, be aware that flash flood may occur. Flash floods are characterized by large amounts of water that appear almost instantaneously (i.e. an instant flood with no warning). If a flash flood occurs move to high ground immediately.

If a flood becomes excessive, you may be required to evacuate your home.

If you have the time, try to bring in and outdoor furniture or possessions, and place furniture in the highest possible point in the house (ideally this would be upstairs in a two story house). Unplug all electrical equipment from the wall.

If you are walking through a flood, ensure you do not walk through any flowing water, regardless of how shallow it is.

If you are driving, do not drive into or through flooded areas, if you find that floods waters begin to rise around your car abandon the car and make your way to higher ground.

Areas in which flood waters are rising are extremely dangerous. There are many instances in which people have been swept away and consequently drowned.

## ***Are You Ready for an Emergency?***

If you happen to see a person in danger of being swept away, help to the best of your ability without jeopardizing your own safety. Try to help them out of the water by holding out a long rod or stick.

Should you pull a person out of flood waters, the following first aid procedure may just help in saving their life.

- Lay the person on their back and apply pressure to the stomach in order to force any water out. Alternatively the person may lie on their stomach and pressure could be applied to the back.
- If a person is unconscious, mouth to mouth resuscitation may be necessary.
- Warm the person up by any means necessary, whether this involves a blanket or sharing body heat.
- Alert emergency services.

***Hurricanes:*** A hurricane is an extreme type of storm or cyclone that generally forms in the tropics. Hurricanes are accompanied by intense, windy storms, and often results in the production of tornadoes, storm surges (similar to a tidal wave- a storm surge is a dome of water that is force onto the shore as a result of intense winds) and generally result in heavy damage due to extensive rainfall and consequent floods.

If the area in which you live is experiencing a hurricane, ensure you listen for up to the minute updates, provided on the television or radio. Due to the intense winds generated by a hurricane, it would be advisable to tie down any loose objects outside, or to store them indoors until the wind subsides.

In some cases, a hurricane may become so extreme that authorities will request you evacuate your home. If this is the case, ensure you follow all instructions.

If you find yourself unable to evacuate your home for one reason or another, ensure you remain indoors at all times and away from any windows or doors. Close all internal doors, and find a means of

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## ***Are You Ready for an Emergency?***

bracing all external doors. Depending on the severity of the hurricane, you may have to shelter in a small internal room or closet on the lowest level of a house. If you are in a room, lie flat on the floor and take shelter under a sturdy object- such as a table.

***Thunderstorms:*** Thunderstorms are a common occurrence, and for this reason people often forget that they have the potential to be extremely dangerous.

Every thunderstorm produces lightning and has the possibility to generate tornados, extreme winds, rain and consequent flooding. In the event that a thunderstorm occurs in the area you live in, remain indoors and refrain from going outside. If you are unable to enter a building of some sort, wait the storm out by sitting in a vehicle.

If you receive warning that a storm is coming, make an attempt to secure any loose items outside, or store them inside until the storm has subsided. The generation of high winds can often cause displacement of outdoor items, causing damage to surrounding structures.

Avoid showering during a storm, as plumbing fixtures can conduct electricity. Though the chances of them being hit by lightning is minimal, it is not a risk you should be taking. If your home phone has a cord, only use this in an emergency, as this may also conduct electricity. Cordless and mobile phones are safe to use as they do not conduct electricity. If lightning strikes a house, the resultant power surge can often cause serious damage to any electrical appliances still plugged in to their sockets. To prevent this from happening, it is always a good idea to unplug electric appliances during a storm.

***Earthquakes:*** Earthquakes are characterized by a series of vibrations of the ground that can often lead to serious damage of surrounding buildings.

If you find yourself in the midst of an earthquake:

**If you are indoors** - Take cover under a strong piece of furniture or crouch in a corner and cover your face and head with your arms. Ensure you stay away from all doors and windows and anything that could possibly fall. Remain inside until all shaking has subsided.

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## ***Are You Ready for an Emergency?***

**If you are outdoors** - move away from any buildings or structures likely to fall. Once vibrations have subsided, be aware that further vibration or shockwaves may occur. Though these further vibrations are generally not as severe as the initial vibrations, they may serve to further weaken structures already affected by the earthquake. Ensure you stay well clear of such damaged areas.

If you are living in a coastal area, earthquakes can result in the formation of a tsunami (also known as a tidal wave). If a tsunami is likely to occur, move inland immediately to higher ground.

After a tsunami has subsided, stay away from flooded areas until authorities have declared it is safe to return.

**Fire:** Whether this disaster is an individualized event or on a large scale, fire escalates quickly and is extremely dangerous. The heat and smoke resulting from fire is also extremely dangerous.

There are some precautions that may be taken to protect you from falling victim to a fire in your home. These include installing smoke alarms on each level of your residence and regularly checking these alarms to ensure they are working correctly. Ensure smoke alarms are replaced every ten years.

To aid in evacuation procedures during a fire, ensure windows and doors are not nailed shut and that there are appropriate fire ladders if you live in a multi story building.

If a fire were to occur in your home, it is important to have a predetermined escape route from each room in the family home. For more information on determining escape routes, refer to chapter three.

Remain low to the ground during your evacuation, to minimize inhalation of smoke and other toxic gases caused by the fire. Before opening any doors, check for heat by using the back of your hand to feel the top of the door.

If the door is hot, do not open it; find another means of exiting the building.

## ***Are You Ready for an Emergency?***

If the door is not hot, open it carefully and ensure the escape route is clear before exiting the room. If the escape route is clear, exit the room and close the door behind you.

If your clothes happen to catch fire during your evacuation, drop to the ground in order to extinguish the fire. Do not run as this will accelerate the burning. Ensure all family members are familiar with the stop, drop and roll method.

If you or a member of your family becomes burned, the following first aid tips may be helpful:

For minor burns or burns no larger than two to three inches in diameter:

- Cool the burn as soon as possible by rinsing in cold water or applying a cold pack.
- Cover the burn with gauze.

For major burns or large burns:

- Seek medical treatment immediately.
- Do not attempt to remove clothing or to put burns under water. Instead, cover the burns with a cool, moist bandage.
- If the individual has stopped breathing, begin resuscitation.

### **Recommended Resource:**

[Act Now, Survive An Emergency Later!](#) - What You Must Know To Prepare For A Disaster And Live Through The Crisis.

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