THE SURVIVAL UNIVERSITY

HOME EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

That Works

FREE STARTER GUIDE











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Begin with a household that can function

A shelf full of supplies is a start. The next question is whether the people who need those supplies can reach them, use them and make a workable decision when conditions change. Start with the problems that could realistically affect your household, then practice the jobs your plan depends on.

This free guide gives you a first plan, a few useful records and a safe practice exercise. The complete guide and household workbook contains the full article, deeper explanations, worked examples, additional scenarios and more planning sheets. You can use this starter guide on its own to begin the work.

For hands-on training with Jason and The Survival University team, visit thesurvivaluniversity.com/courses/.

Choose the next action from the conditions in front of you

☐ Check for immediate danger, account for people and animals, and call for emergency help when needed and available.

☐ Get safe lighting, keep exits clear and look for reliable local information.

☐ Decide whether the home is safe to occupy. Fire, a gas smell, floodwater, structural damage or an evacuation instruction changes the decision.

☐ Assign the next jobs and agree when to check back. Include the person who may be away, cannot hear an alarm easily or needs help moving.

The Rule of 3s is a rough teaching reminder about air, exposure, water and food. It is not a survival timetable. Address immediate breathing problems, severe bleeding and the actual threats present. Do not wait for a number on a chart to expire.

Build gradually and test what you add

Inventory what you can actually use. Start with a manageable reserve and build toward 2 weeks or more as your household, space and budget allow. Count care, pets, sanitation, transportation and the people who may need help. A plan that depends entirely on one person being home still needs work.

Our 3 most likely disruptions

The gap we will fix first / person / date

Planning and accessibility resources: [1, 2].

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Write contacts, destinations and jobs down



Confirm arrangements with the people involved. A name on a list does not establish permission, availability or access. Keep a protected paper copy where your household can reach it without internet service.

Contact	Name / number / instructions
Emergency services	911 in the United States
Contact outside the affected area	
School / childcare / caregiver	
Care team / pharmacy / equipment supplier	
Veterinarian / animal helper	
Utility / building manager	
Local emergency alerts / radio station	

Place	Exact location / access
Meeting place near home	
Destination outside the neighborhood	
Alternate destination	

Job	Primary / agreed backup
Children, pets and departure	
Water, meals and sanitation	
Medical care and equipment	
Information and check-ins	

Check-in time / what happens if it is missed

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Water you can reach, move and use



Start with at least 1 gallon per person per day, then add for pets, heat, illness, activity and other needs. This is a planning baseline, not enough for normal showers and unrestricted flushing. Measure household use during a safe practice day to improve the estimate. [3]

Calculation	Our amount
People × days × 1 gallon	____ × ____ × 1 = ____ gallons
Additional care, pets, hygiene and cooking	____ gallons
Total target / usable amount stored	____ / ____ gallons
Gap / next purchase or storage task	

Use unopened commercial water or properly cleaned food-grade water containers. Keep drinking water away from fuel and chemicals, protected from heat and sunlight. Date water filled at home and replace it every 6 months. Follow commercial-water labeling. Choose containers the intended user can lift and pour, and stable storage that can support their weight. [3]

Treatment has limits

Follow local water notices. Water containing fuel, toxic chemicals or radioactive contamination cannot be made safe by boiling or disinfecting. Find a different safe source. Clear water is not proof of safe water. [4]

For microbial contamination, boiling is an option. If cloudy, let water settle or strain it through a clean cloth and use the clearer water. Bring clear water to a rolling boil for 1 minute, or 3 minutes above 6,500 feet. Let it cool and protect it in clean, sanitized, tightly covered containers. [4]

Read the exact filter or treatment product instructions. Many microfilters remove bacteria and parasites but do not remove viruses. Product, volume, temperature and contact time matter. Keep printed instructions with the equipment, and keep untreated containers separate from drinking water. [4, 15]

Our treatment method / printed directions kept at

Alternate safe-water source / transport

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Count meals and test the cooking method



Choose familiar food your household will eat. Count complete meals and portions, including dietary needs and no-cook options. Test the opener, cookware, water requirement, fuel and cleanup. A pile of ingredients does not tell you whether dinner works during an outage.

Day	Breakfast / lunch / dinner	No-cook alternative
1		
2		
3		

Prepare one meal with your backup arrangement

Meal / portions / who prepared it

Water used / fuel used / time

Missing ingredient, tool or cleanup supply

Track temperature as well as time

Keep appliance thermometers. An unopened refrigerator generally holds safe cold temperatures for about 4 hours. A full unopened freezer may hold for 48 hours, or 24 hours if half full. Track actual time and temperature and follow FDA guidance. Do not taste food to judge safety. [5]

> Outdoor combustion cooking equipment stays outdoors. If you have no safe permitted cooking location, use no-cook meals. An open window does not make outdoor cooking equipment safe inside. [6]

Rotate supplies into ordinary meals. Vacuum sealing does not make perishable food shelf-stable. Use tested preservation methods and the correct altitude adjustments. [5, 7]

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Plan for medical care and breathable air



Keep trauma supplies easy to identify and reach. Discuss reputable commercial tourniquets, wound-packing gauze, pressure dressings, gloves, shears and protection against heat loss with a qualified instructor. Take hands-on bleeding-control, first aid and CPR/AED training. Keep separate practice equipment. Supplies support trained care and do not replace emergency help. [8, 9]

Arrange medicine refills and backup supplies with your prescriber and pharmacy. Keep a current medication, allergy and care-contact list securely accessible. Follow exact storage directions. Confirm medical-device battery compatibility and runtime with the supplier or care team. Agree on relocation before necessary power or care fails. [10]

Match respiratory protection to the hazard

A well-fitting, NIOSH Approved N95 can reduce exposure to smoke particles. It does not protect against gases, vapors or carbon monoxide, and it does not supply oxygen. Facial hair at the seal and a poor fit reduce protection. Children may not fit adult respirators. Ask your clinician about individual medical concerns. [11, 12]

A gas mask is not universal protection. The facepiece, filter or cartridge must match the identified hazard, fit correctly and be used within its limits. An air-purifying respirator cannot make an oxygen-deficient or unknown dangerous atmosphere safe. Do not enter smoke or a chemical release to test equipment. [12]

For outdoor smoke, plan a cleaner-air room with appropriate particle filtration and safe temperature. Close outside openings when advised, reduce indoor particle sources and follow air-cleaner and HVAC instructions. Keep a relocation option if the room becomes too hot or filtration cannot be maintained. For a chemical release, follow incident-specific official instructions. [13]

Need	Location / backup / action
Trauma kit and trained helper	
Medicines and ongoing care	
Cleaner-air room / filter / power	
When and where we relocate	

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Keep shelter and power safe



Check alarms, extinguishers and exits. Keep dry layers, bedding and insulation beneath resting people. Identify a warmer or cooler refuge, including transportation, accessibility, pet arrangements and who confirms it is available. Safe temperature and cleaner air belong in the same plan.

> Never heat a home with a charcoal grill, outdoor stove or gas oven. If a carbon-monoxide alarm sounds, move everyone outside and seek emergency help. Never re-enter to prove the alarm wrong. [6]

Give every electrical load a job

List the devices you need, their running power and hours of use. Watts × hours gives watt-hours. Check starting demand, connectors, usable battery capacity and losses. Test the actual system safely. Give medical equipment, useful lighting and communication priority over convenience.

Device / job	Watts × hours	Backup / tested runtime

Keep generator exhaust away from people

Run portable generators outdoors, at least 20 feet from doors, windows and vents, with exhaust directed away from buildings. Never use one in a home, garage or other enclosed space. Use working battery-powered or battery-backup CO alarms. Follow the manufacturer’s electrical and weather-protection instructions. Never backfeed through a wall outlet. Have a qualified electrician handle building connections. [6]

Shut down and let the engine cool before refueling. Store fuel in approved containers in a permitted location away from living areas and ignition sources. Keep the correct engine manual and maintenance supplies. Practice routine checks with a knowledgeable person before depending on the engine. [6]

Our relocation trigger / refuge / transport

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Account for sanitation and pets



Learn whether the sewer or septic system can safely accept waste during an outage. Pump failure, damage or flooding can make flushing unsafe. Follow local instructions for toilet use and disposal. [14]

Set up the whole sanitation routine

☐ A stable, accessible toilet arrangement with privacy and light.

☐ Appropriate liners, collection containers and a confirmed disposal plan.

☐ A separate handwashing station with safe water, soap, drying supplies and wastewater collection.

☐ Menstrual products, diapers, incontinence supplies and ordinary personal items.

☐ Secure waste holding separated from food and drinking water.

☐ A daily check of soap, water, liners and accumulated waste.

Practice the setup without actual waste. Use cleaning products according to their labels. Never mix bleach with ammonia, acids or other cleaners. Disposable dishes reduce some washing but increase trash. Measure both water use and waste during your practice day.

Pets belong in every calculation

Include each animal’s food, water, medicine, identification, handling equipment and cleanup needs. Confirm the destination accepts the species and number of animals. Practice calm loading with people and supplies already accounted for. An empty vehicle is not a realistic loading test.

Animal / need	Daily amount / arrangement
Food and water	
Medicine / veterinary contact	
Carrier / leash / identification	
Destination / agreed helper	

Toilet / handwashing location / disposal contact

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Move and communicate without GPS



Keep current paper road and city maps. Mark home, destinations, alternate routes and useful landmarks. Look for shared bottlenecks such as the same bridge used by 2 apparently different routes. Practice a familiar route with a passenger reading the map while the driver concentrates on driving. A compass can help orient a map, but it does not tell you whether a road is open or safe.

Make departure a practiced job

☐ Maintain the vehicle and know the tire, battery and recovery equipment you can safely use.

☐ Keep a workable fuel reserve, subject to safe storage and local rules.

☐ Load people, pets, mobility aids, medicines, water and bags together.

☐ Confirm destinations, access, travel conditions and an alternate plan.

☐ Set a departure trigger before an unsafe situation forces a rushed decision.

A radio needs another person and an agreement

Write down who you will contact, which device or permitted channel you will use, check-in times and what happens if contact fails. Keep printed instructions, charged batteries and a charging plan. Test the equipment over the actual distance and terrain. Follow the rules for the radio service involved.

> Practice message: “This is ____. We are at ____. Everyone is ____. We need ____. Our next check-in is ____.” Ask the receiver to repeat important details back. Do not send false distress messages for practice.

Plan	Our arrangement
Primary / alternate route	
Departure trigger / driver / backup	
Contact / method / check-in time	
If communication fails	

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Build the support around the supplies

One person cannot know every skill, be in every place or carry every responsibility. Talk with neighbors and trusted people before a disruption. Confirm who can help with transport, children, animals, repairs, care and communication. Agree on limits and backups. Respect privacy and do not promise somebody else's time or equipment. Jess Caldwell's Wildkind Outdoors material offers more on community resilience and practical preparedness. [16, 17]

Keep money and records usable

Keep a manageable cash reserve in useful denominations without undermining ordinary bills. Protect identification, insurance, medication lists, ownership records and important contacts. Plan access if a phone, charger, password or account is unavailable. Completed household records can contain sensitive information. Share them only with people who need the details.

Use small spaces without making them dangerous

Group supplies by use, label them and keep an inventory. Use reachable space under beds or in cabinets while keeping exits, ventilation and access to electrical equipment clear. Check storage loads, especially for water. A neatly packed container is not useful if the person who needs it cannot reach or lift it.

Plan for people as well as tasks

Keep familiar food, simple games, books and comfort items. Set routines and divide work fairly. Talk through disagreements and de-escalate unnecessary conflict. Check on people who may be isolated. Include rest and ordinary personal needs in the plan.

Skill / support needed	Agreed helper / contact / limits
Transport or animal care	
Repair or equipment knowledge	
Medical or daily-care backup	
Check-in / companionship	

Records location / authorized backup

Next storage or access problem to fix

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Practice safely, then repair the plan



Start with a short exercise while normal services remain available. Agree on the purpose and the stopping point. Do not shut off necessary medical equipment, withhold care, create smoke, enter unsafe areas or make emergency calls for practice. Talk through dangerous actions instead of performing them.

Try a 2-hour household exercise

First, have someone other than the usual planner locate lights, water, medical supplies and the written contact plan. Next, prepare one meal with the intended backup arrangement in a safe permitted location, or use a no-cook meal. Measure water, fuel, time and cleanup. Send an agreed practice check-in to a willing participant.

Then introduce one change: the normal driver is unavailable, the usual route is closed or the main water container is too heavy for the person at home. Let the household explain and demonstrate a safe alternative. If you have pets or mobility equipment, rehearse calm loading. Finish by checking that all ordinary services and care remain in place.

Record the result before buying more equipment

What failed or was awkward	Owner / due date	How we will retest

Keep useful measurements. One day does not test every season, illness or long-term problem, but it reveals gaps that a shopping list can miss. Extend the practice gradually. Set review dates for contacts, water, food, medicines, batteries and equipment, following their actual instructions.

> Finish the first week with one corrected problem and one task that a second person can now perform. Keep building from there.

Next exercise date / participants

Next household review

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Sources and next steps



Use current local instructions and the manuals for your own equipment. The references below support the safety guidance in this starter guide. Keep individualized care arrangements with your household plan. This guide supports practical instruction and does not replace it.

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https://www.epa.gov/wildfires/how-create-cleaner-air-room-home

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https://www.cdc.gov/drinking-water/prevention/about-choosing-home-water-filters.html

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[17] Jess Caldwell, Wildkind Outdoors. Building Your Resilience Toolkit: Holistic Survival, Essential Gear We Carry.
https://www.wildkindoutdoors.com/blog/building-your-resilience-toolkit