

Home Storage: Build on the Basics

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The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has long advocated that where possible every family store basic food, water, and other necessities to tide them over during emergencies and times of economic upheaval. Recently, the First Presidency of the Church spoke again on this subject: "We continue to encourage members to store sufficient food, clothing, and where possible, fuel for at least one year. (Check local laws and ordinances.) We have not laid down an exact formula for what should be stored. However, we suggest that members concentrate on essential foods that sustain life, such as grains, legumes, cooking oil, powdered milk, salt, sugar or honey, and water. Most families can achieve and maintain this basic level of preparedness. The decision to do more than this rests with the individual."

If families would think in terms of storing only foods basic to survival, or if they supplement the food storage they already have with the basics to build it up to a year's supply, the task would be simpler than they might think. They would then be prepared for food emergencies. Once you have stored the basic food items, you need to regularly include them in your daily meals. The following guidelines will help in purchasing and storing basic food items.

Grains—include wheat, spelt (similar to wheat), rice, oats, dried corn, barley, and other cereal grains. Flour, cornmeal, cous-cous, and pasta products such as macaroni and spaghetti are also included. Each family should store various grain items that suit their individual circumstances. Grains may be stored in tightly sealed metal or heavy plastic containers.

Legumes—an inexpensive, nutritious protein food that is a staple in ethnic diets worldwide, include beans (pinto, white, kidney, lima, winged, red, navy, pink, black-eyed, azuki and other varieties), chick peas (garbanzos), split peas, lentils, and peanuts. They can be stored in clean, dry metal or plastic containers with tight-fitting lids. They may also be dry-pack canned.

Powdered Milk—instant or regular, is an excellent storage item, providing protein and calcium to the diet. (Whey Powder is a nutritious by-product of cheese-making and comes in powdered form also. It is used mostly as an addition to baked goods such as breads and muffins.)

In the past, storing large amounts of powdered milk has been recommended. However, this has often led to spoilage and waste. More recent studies show that smaller quantities of milk are adequate if people store and eat larger quantities of grains. Powdered milk can be stored in the original sealed packages, or if purchased in bulk, it can be stored in tightly covered metal or plastic containers. It can also be dry-pack canned. You may also use canned milk as part of the milk storage program, but you must rotate it regularly.

Nutritional Yeast—also called Brewer's Yeast or Food Yeast, is high in B vitamins. Available in powder or flake form, it can be added to soups, casseroles, and baked goods. (Note: This is not a leavening and will not cause bread to rise. It is an inert yeast, which allows the nutrients to be absorbed by the human body.)

Fats and Oil—Fat is essential to every diet, even for those who are trying to lose weight. Children especially need fat to help them process the massive amounts of nutrients their growing bodies need. Shortening, olive and other vegetable oils (preferably cold-pressed), and mayonnaise are suggested for storage. (Avoid hydrogenated products, which contain trans-fatty acids.) Store fats in sealed containers in cool, dry, dark places and rotate them frequently.

Salt—Nutritionists recommend iodized rather than plain salt, when it is available. Store salt in its original container in a cool, dry place. In a damp climate, to avoid clumping, store salt in a hermetically sealed container.

Sugar, Honey and Molasses—Whether to store sugar and/or honey and/or molasses is a matter of personal choice. Processed sugar does not provide the minerals found in molasses or the living enzymes found in honey. Honey, on the other hand, must never be given to infants due to a strain of botulism that does not affect older children and adults. Store honey in small containers. Then, if it crystallizes, you can immerse the containers in hot (not boiling) water to reliquefy it. Warning: Do not try to liquefy honey in metal containers directly on the stove top. Pressure can build up and cause the container to explode. I know someone who had this experience with a five gallon can of honey and it was not a pretty sight!

Molasses provides minerals such as iron, if your family doesn't mind the strong flavor. Molasses has a long shelf life when stored unopened in its original container.

Store granulated and raw sugar in a tightly covered metal or plastic container or place it on a shelf away from moisture in its unopened cloth or paper bag. Occasionally knead the bag to help prevent the sugar from hardening.

Water—is more essential than food in sustaining life. Store a minimum of seven gallons of water per person for drinking and food preparation. (Keep in mind that dehydrated foods will require water to reconstitute.) Store an additional seven gallons per person of the same quality water for bathing, brushing teeth, and dishwashing. Use heavy plastic containers with tight-fitting lids. Metal containers, which may corrode, tend to give water an unpleasant taste. Glass is best to avoid leaching chemicals and metals into the water, but is subject to breakage and should be stored on the floor in cardboard boxes. The home water heater can be considered a water storage tank. In the event of ruptured water and/or sewer lines, turn off the intake valve to the water heater immediately to prevent contamination. If there is any doubt as to the purity of your water supply, no matter what the source, purify it by one of the following methods before use:

- Boil vigorously for one to two minutes
- Add chlorine bleach (5 percent sodium hypochlorite solution). Recommendations are for 1/2 teaspoon per gallon for clear water and 1 teaspoon per gallon if the water is cloudy or colored.
- Add commercially available water purification tablets. (Check expiration dates.)
- Filter with a hand-operated pump that is fitted with a filter intended to eliminate dangerous bacteria and toxic metals. Of the four methods of water purification given, this is the only one that will eliminate heavy metals and improve the taste of the water. Camping supply stores and catalogs may carry several brands, and you can often find customer reviews on the Internet to guide you in your choice.

If you store it away from sunlight in clean containers, and if it is safe bacterially at the time of storage, water will remain pure indefinitely. Shake the water to aerate it and “freshen” the taste immediately before use.

Storage Guidelines

1. Use storage areas that are well ventilated, clean, dark, dry, and cool. If your conditions are less satisfactory, rotate contents more frequently than recommended. Even though space may be limited, there are usually "hidden areas" for storage. The space under your bed or in the back of closets can be used to stash cans of food that don't need to be kept in cold storage. Do not, however, store food in an attic, as it is likely to get hot in the summer.

Avoid having all your food in one area of the home. That area may become inaccessible due to fire, earthquake, etc. Also do not use only one method of packing and storing. Glass can break, freezers can lose power, rodents can chew through plastic, and metal cans can corrode (especially if you live in an area where salt or brackish water might be a problem). By varying your storage methods and locations (basement, garage, tool shed, etc.) you are increasing the chance that at least some of your supplies will survive a catastrophic event.

2. Do not place food storage containers on or against cement or dirt floors and walls. Place pieces of wood between the storage containers and the floor or wall to provide ventilation and protect against moisture.
3. Keep stored food away from products that may affect the flavor and quality of the food, such as paint and solvents and cleaning supplies.
4. Rotate and use food storage items regularly. Keep a current list of stored foods, quantities, and processing/purchase dates. A marker board that can be erased by wiping is handy to keep your list current as you rotate, use, and replenish supplies. Date food items as you purchase or can them, then store new supplies of food at the back of the shelves, moving earlier purchases forward to be used first. In addition to maintaining a fresh food supply, this will ensure that your family grows accustomed to eating the foods you store. It will also help you learn the best ways to prepare the food.

It is a good idea to assess the practicality of your storage program from time to time by using only stored foods for family meals for a few days. If by the third day family members are still showing up for dinner, you can consider your food storage and preparation plan a success!

5. If a family member cannot or will not, under ordinary circumstances, eat one of the foods recommended for storing, do not expect him/her to do so in an emergency. Store foods that are nutritious, but also that you know will be eaten. Be especially aware of the needs of small children and the elderly or infirm. An emergency situation can exacerbate allergies or picky appetites at a time when everyone needs all the nourishment they can get.
6. Do not go into debt. Acquire food items gradually, budgeting carefully to include a few essentials on your grocery list. Every time you go shopping pick up one extra can or package of a non-perishable. Also, most grocery stores will order a case of a single item for you at discount since they won't have to unpack it and stock the shelves. Check grocery outlets regularly for overstock and case lot items. (Examine the packaging for soundness and a future expiration date.) Using the basic foods in day-to-day menus can cut food costs and allow you to purchase more supplies.