

Hurricane safety series: Three-day plan to eat from a can

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As the Atlantic hurricane season kicks off, residents of coastal communities are preparing for a potential severe weather emergency.

Having enough water and canned goods is an important part of storm preparation. But creating a meal plan in advance also can be valuable, especially if refrigeration and electricity are unavailable.

"Whether it's a hurricane or another natural disaster, it's important to know basic food and water safety in case of [power outages](#) or flooding," says Sherry Mahoney, director of Nutrition and Food Services at Mayo Clinic's Florida campus. "But having a meal plan for your family can help ensure proper nutrition, energy and long-term wellness, since most people aren't thinking about recipes during a disaster."

"Eating out of a can or box doesn't have to be boring," says Mahoney. "There are many things you can mix and match from your pantry to provide healthy and delicious meals for your family."

Annually, Mahoney's team creates a three-day meal plan, including a grocery list, to feed a family of four. None of the recipes require the use of power or refrigeration.

"Coconut Oatmeal Energy Bars," "Mango Tango Salad," "Balsamic Pineapple Chicken," and "Chocoholic Peanut Butter Pie" may sound extravagant, but all the items come from the pantry, Mahoney says.

"These recipes are all colorful, exciting and nutritious," she adds.

Mahoney offers her top tips for prepping your pantry and planning an emergency menu:

- Know the safe temperature zones of perishable food.

- When the power goes out, keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible. The refrigerator, if unopened, will keep food cold for about four hours. A full freezer will maintain its temperature for around 48 hours (24 hours if half-full) if the door remains closed.

- Stock up on condiments, such as ketchup, mustard, soy sauce and barbecue sauce. Items that are vinegar-based have a long shelf life and are versatile. Consider travel-sized containers for convenience.

- Have various canned protein options on hand, such as chicken, salmon, beans and peanut butter.

- Get your calcium via boxes of powdered milk or shelf-stable cartons for cereal or desserts.

- Dried fruits, nuts and spices can add a boost of flavor to otherwise bland dishes.

- Don't forget a manual can opener.

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