

Guiding principles for your diet during a disaster or emergency

During a disaster or emergency, access to dialysis treatments, medications, grocery stores, refrigeration, clean water, and medical care may be limited. An emergency kidney diet is designed to help patients stay as safe as possible until normal care can be restored. This emergency eating plan is intended for short-term use (generally up to 2–4 weeks) and focuses on reducing the most immediate nutrition-related risks while helping you maintain adequate energy and hydration.


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✓ Focus on the Biggest Intermediate Risks

During an emergency, the most important nutrition-related concerns for many people with kidney disease are:

- Too much fluid in the body (fluid or volume overload)
- High blood potassium levels (hyperkalemia)
- Inadequate calorie intake leading to weakness or malnutrition
- Foodborne illness from unsafe food or water

Your emergency food choices should help reduce these risks while providing enough calories and nutrients to keep you going.



✓ Prioritize Safe, Shelf-Stable Foods

Keep a supply of foods that:

- Are readily available and affordable
- Can be stored safely without refrigeration
- Require little or no cooking
- Have a long shelf life
- Are easy to prepare during power outages or evacuations

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✓ Be Mindful of Fluids

How much you need to drink during an emergency may depend on whether you still make urine.

- If you continue to make urine, your goal is generally to stay hydrated and avoid dehydration.
- If you make little or no urine, you may be at higher risk for fluid overload and may need to limit fluids according to your health care team's guidance.

Plan ahead by storing bottled water and/or maintaining access to water purification methods such as filters or purification tablets.

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✓ Manage Hyperkalemia Risk

High blood potassium can become dangerous, especially if dialysis treatments are delayed. When selecting emergency foods:

- Check ingredient lists for potassium additives in packaged foods. Avoid potassium chloride if possible.
- Choose foods that help prevent constipation and are high in fiber, i.e., whole plant foods. If constipation is present, consider a laxative, e.g. psyllium fiber.
- Limit portion sizes to a ¼ cup of dried fruits and a ¼ cup of nuts per day, as these contain concentrated amounts of potassium.
- Manage blood sugars as best as possible. High blood sugar (hyperglycemia) can contribute to hyperkalemia. Ensure that insulin can be kept cold.

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✓ A Perfect Diet Isn't Critical During an Emergency

Eating enough calories each day during an emergency is important. Include foods that:

- Provide carbohydrates for energy
- Contain healthy fats that add calories without excessive sodium
- Can be eaten throughout the day in small meals and snacks
- Spreading food intake across the day may help manage hunger, thirst, and blood sugar levels.

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✓ Pay Attention to Food Safety

Food and water safety become especially important during disasters.

- Discard foods that may have spoiled due to loss of refrigeration.
- Use safe water sources whenever possible.
- Wash hands when able and follow safe food-handling practices.
- Individuals taking immunosuppressive medications, including many kidney transplant recipients, should be especially cautious about foodborne illness risks.



✓ Continue Taking Medications Safely

Have a plan for taking medications if clean drinking water is limited.

Options such as unsweetened applesauce or other soft foods may help with medication administration when appropriate. Always follow medication-specific instructions, such as whether to take medications with food, and consult your healthcare team whenever possible.



✓ Prepare for Diabetes-Related Emergencies

Individuals with diabetes should include supplies to manage low blood sugar.

Examples may include:

- Glucose powder
- Dextrose tablets
- Jellybeans, hard candies, or similar fast-acting carbohydrate sources
- Small amounts of juice when fluids are available

Keep these supplies readily accessible in your emergency kit.



✓ Remember That This is a Temporary Plan

An emergency kidney diet is not intended to replace your usual nutrition plan. It is a short-term strategy designed to help you stay safe until regular medical care, dialysis treatments, medications, food access, and normal routines can resume.

**When in doubt,
reach out.**

Contact your kidney care team or local health services as soon as it is safe to do so.