Winter is coming! Are you prepared?

By Erika Grover

You wake up to 5 feet of snow outside your window. Plow trucks can’t keep up with the constant snow. The government places a state of emergency in effect for the town. Your family is stuck in the house until the snow stops and roads are cleared. You wonder if you have enough food to outlast the snow and begin to rummage through the pantry.

You never know when a disaster may happen but being prepared is always a good idea. One way to be prepared is to have an emergency food kit. These kits should have enough food and water to last each member of the family for at least two weeks. There are many foods that are perfect to keep in your emergency food kit; most important is anything that is non-perishable.

**Non-perishable foods include:**

- Canned meats – Tuna or Spam.
- Canned fruits and vegetables
- Canned pasta – Spaghetti O’s
- Cereal and granola
- Crackers and cookies
- Peanut butter
- Dried fruits
- Soups

These are foods that will last for a couple years unopened, some will even last forever. The cereal, granola and crackers provide the carbohydrates you need to keep energy levels up. This will allow you to keep up with other chores around the house. I believe there are 5 feet of snow still to clear! Since you will likely have to do chores, like shoveling or getting wood for a fire, you need to maintain your muscles. This is where the canned meats and peanut butter come in handy since they have the protein your muscles need. It is always important to have a balanced diet so you should have fruits and vegetables in your kit to provide vitamins and minerals for optimal health.
While dealing with the stress of a natural disaster it is also a good idea to have comfort foods and sweet snacks. Cookies, pudding cups and candy bars have a place in every emergency kit as a way to make the kids feel better and keep their spirits up. These foods are also calorie dense which will help everyone maintain their weight while eating less. But really, who needs an excuse to buy junk food?

One thing to look out for when stocking your emergency food kit is sodium. When buying canned products, like soup or vegetables, it is best to get low sodium options when available. Foods that are high in sodium will cause you to drink more fluids and you will fly through your water supply faster than planned. Plus if you don’t have power you probably don’t want to have to go to the bathroom in the dark every 20 minutes.

Speaking of water, this is just as important to have in your kit as food. For an emergency food kit you should have at least one gallon of water per person to last at least two weeks. Other options for drinks are available too, like juice boxes, tea and sports drinks. These choices also offer added calories and electrolytes which are necessary if you are doing strenuous work to keep the family safe.

When packing your emergency food kit there are a few non-food items that you will need as well. **For example:**

- Can opener
- Sterno gel fuel
- Matches or lighter
- Pans and utensils
- Medications
- Multi-vitamins

The most important tool to have with you is a hand held can opener. If you don’t have this how will you eat those delicious Spaghetti O’s? In order to heat up your canned goods you will need a heat source. One option is Sterno gel fuel; this is a gel that comes in a can that is used for many food service events as well as a place to cook in an emergency. You will also need matches or a lighter in order to light the Sterno gel for cooking. Now that you have a place
to cook you may also want small sauce pans to boil water or heat up your food. In order to eat these foods you will need utensils; it is a good idea to have a box of plastic spoons and forks in your kit. By using plastic you won’t have to worry about washing too many dishes.

Multi-vitamins are a good item to have in your kit since you may not be getting all the nutrients you need while eating your emergency food. This will help you stay healthy and allow you to maintain the vitamin and mineral stores in your body. Your emergency food kit should also include any medications your family takes, especially prescription medications. If it is a medication you absolutely need you should ask your doctor for back up bottles to put in your kit. Medicine like Tylenol, cough drops or cold relief pills should be kept in your kit, just in case.

The final two things you need to do with your emergency food kit are to store it in a safe place and check the dates occasionally. Your kit should be stored in a place that is not likely to be affected by any natural disaster but it needs to be in a place that you can easily get to in an emergency. Good places may be the basement or the pantry. These places should not be exposed to extreme temperatures or too much light since this can affect the food products. Even though these products are chosen for their long shelf life it is important to check the dates when you buy them and every few years they are in the kit. This will allow you to be sure the food will be good to eat if it is ever needed.

Even though you have the food in your emergency kit it is also important to know what to do with the food in your fridge. If you’ll be without power for longer than 4 hours you should take the essentials out and keep them in a cooler with ice. You could also use the snow to your advantage and put that in the cooler. Essential items are ones that you know you will use and they should also be items that you can cook easily with your limited heating source. You must keep the food below 40⁰ F in order for it to be safe; you should keep a meat thermometer in your emergency kit to check the temperature. Not all food can be saved and even in the cooler these items will not last longer than a few days. But, this is why you have the emergency kit. Everyone in your family should know the emergency plan and be aware of the placement of your emergency food kit. Let’s hope, though, that the blizzard never comes.

Reference