Water and Food: Emergency Supply Essentials for 72 Hours to 2 Weeks

You can survive three weeks without food and three days without water — which means water is always the first emergency to solve, and it's the one most households get wrong.

Introduction

The average household has approximately three days of food in the home at any given time, most of which requires refrigeration or cooking. Water supply is even more precarious — almost no households store meaningful drinking water independently of the mains supply.

In an emergency that disrupts both power and water infrastructure — a common outcome in floods, earthquakes, or extended winter storms — a household with no stored water faces a life-threatening situation within 24 hours. This guide gives you the specific quantities, containers, and management strategies to move from that position to genuine resilience across three time horizons: 72 hours, two weeks, and beyond.

Water: How Much and How to Store It

The correct minimum

The standard recommendation from emergency management agencies is 3 litres per person per day. This covers drinking (approximately 2 litres) and basic hygiene. In hot weather or high physical exertion scenarios, this increases to 4–5 litres. Do not calculate for cooking water separately — your food storage plan should account for this.

For a family of four, the minimum 72-hour supply is 36 litres. A two-week supply requires 168 litres. These are not large volumes — a standard bath holds 200 litres.

Container types

- **5-litre rigid food-grade containers:** The most practical for rotation and portability. Label with fill date and store in a cool, dark location away from cleaning chemicals (plastic absorbs vapour from nearby chemicals over time).
- **20-litre water barrels:** More space-efficient for large stored volumes. Difficult to move when full (20 kg), so position them permanently in a cupboard or utility room.
- **Commercial bottled water:** Convenient but expensive at scale and generates significant plastic waste. Effective as a supplement, not a primary strategy. Rotate every 12–18 months regardless of printed date.

Purification: your three methods

1. **Your PREPORA portable water filter** filters up to 4,000 litres at 0.1-micron filtration — fine enough to remove bacteria, protozoa, and microplastics. Use it to drink from any available water source: rivers, collected rainwater, garden water butts. Flow rate is 300 ml per minute, adequate for continuous household use.
2. **Your PREPORA water purification tablets (×20 included)** — chlorine-based, each tablet treats one litre. Effective against bacteria and viruses. Dissolve in water and wait 30 minutes before drinking. Use when the filter is unavailable or when treating large volumes quickly.
3. **Boiling** remains the most reliable purification method for bacterial and viral contamination. Bring water to a rolling boil for one minute (three minutes above 2,000 m altitude). Requires fuel, but produces water safe for all uses including infant formula.

Food: What to Stock

The three-tier approach

Tier 1 — 72-hour baseline (always ready): Your PREPORA Survival Ration Food Box provides this tier immediately. The 500 g of calorie-dense ration bars requires no preparation, has a five-year shelf life, and contains sufficient calories to sustain two adults for 72 hours. Keep this in your kit at all times as a non-negotiable baseline.

Supplement with: canned goods (tuna, beans, soup, tomatoes), nut butter (2,000+ kcal/jar, no refrigeration), crackers and rice cakes, dried fruits and nuts, and long-life milk or plant-based milk.

Tier 2 — Two-week supply (build over time): Target 2,000 kcal per adult per day (1,500 kcal for children). For a family of four adults, that is 56,000 kcal for two weeks. A practical two-week pantry built around canned and dried goods includes:

- 14 cans of protein (tuna, sardines, lentils, beans, chickpeas)
- 4 kg of rice or pasta
- 2 kg of oats
- 3–4 jars of nut butter
- A variety of canned vegetables and tomatoes
- Condiments, salt, cooking oil, and sugar (improve morale and add calories)
- Powdered milk (2 kg) if young children are in the household

Tier 3 — Extended supply (optional but recommended): Freeze-dried meals, commercially packaged long-term emergency food, or sealed buckets of dried staples can extend your supply to two months or beyond. These are an investment — prioritise Tiers 1 and 2 first.

Dietary and medical considerations

Audit your household for specific needs: infant formula, diabetic-appropriate foods (low glycaemic index), gluten-free requirements, cultural food preferences that affect compliance. An emergency food supply that no one will actually eat is not an emergency food supply. Store what your family genuinely consumes.

Rotation and Freshness

The most common failure in emergency food storage is the discovery, during an actual emergency, that everything in your supply expired two years ago.

FIFO: First In, First Out. Always use the oldest items first and restock from the back. Label every container and can with the purchase date in large text using a permanent marker — the printed expiry dates are often on the bottom and difficult to read quickly.

Set an annual review date. Once a year — the same date every year — open your emergency supply, review all expiry dates, move items within six months of expiry into regular household use, and restock what you consumed. This review takes under an hour and ensures your supply is never stale.

Temperature matters. Heat and temperature fluctuation accelerate food degradation. A garage that reaches 40°C in summer will halve the effective shelf life of canned goods compared to a cool interior cupboard. Store at below 21°C where possible.

Cooking Without Power

A significant proportion of your stored food requires cooking. Plan for this specifically — it is not guaranteed.

Camp stove with canister fuel: The most practical indoor-safe cooking solution during an outage. A single 227g gas canister provides approximately 90 minutes of cooking time. Store three to five canisters (sealed, away from heat sources) for a two-week supply. Never use a camp stove in an enclosed space without ventilation — butane and propane produce carbon monoxide.

Wood fire: If your home has a fireplace or garden, wood fire provides sustained cooking capacity. Hardwood burns hotter and longer than softwood. Maintain a small supply of seasoned firewood (or compressed wood blocks) in a dry outdoor store. A cast-iron pot or Dutch oven placed directly on coals is a reliable, fuel-efficient cooking method.

Carbon monoxide risk: This cannot be stated too emphatically. Do not use petrol generators, gas barbecues, charcoal grills, or any combustion appliance indoors or in enclosed spaces. Carbon monoxide is odourless and kills silently. Every year, emergency power outages produce CO poisoning deaths — always cook outdoors or with adequate ventilation.

No-cook meals: Build your food supply to include genuine no-cook options — ration bars, nut butter, crackers, canned fish, dried fruit, nuts. If cooking is impossible (fuel runs out, conditions are unsafe), these items keep the household fed without any heat source.

Key Takeaways

- Store 3 litres of water per person per day as a minimum; your PREPORA water filter and purification tablets provide a secondary supply from any available source.
- Build your food supply across three tiers: 72-hour ration bars (already in your kit), two-week pantry, and optional extended supply.
- Rotate all stored food using FIFO and review expiry dates annually on a fixed calendar date.
- Plan your cooking fuel supply explicitly — carbon monoxide from indoor combustion appliances kills every year during emergencies.

> ***Water first, calories second, morale third — in that order, and with specific quantities planned before any emergency forces the calculation.***

Part of the PREPORA Survival Guide series. Download the full guide at prepora-gear.com/guides.