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## During an emergency: minimise food and water spoilage

During an emergency normal household appliances such as fridges and ovens may break down or lack power, our food could spoil faster and our water supply could become contaminated. To avoid this happening follow the steps below:

• eat perishable foods, for example bread and meat first, as they spoil faster than non-perishable food

• eat canned foods last

• minimise food spoilage by opening the fridge or freezer only when you need to take food out

• do not eat vegetables or fruits that have been lying in flood water

• cover all food with plastic wrap or store in waterproof containers

• leave bottles, drink cans and water containers in the fridge (if it’s working) to keep things cold

• throw out rotting or tainted food before it spoils other food.

## During an emergency: focus on hygiene

**Maintaining hygiene around food preparation and cooking requires more thought than normal.**

• always wash and dry your hands before preparing food – if water is in short supply keep some in a bowl with disinfectant

• ensure all utensils are clean before use

• cook food thoroughly

• cover all food with plastic wrap or store in waterproof containers

• keep a supply of fly spray

• rubbish containing food scraps must be protected from flies and rats by wrapping or putting in a sealed container.

## During an emergency: use safe cooking and washing water

The following household facilities can be used to cook, wash dishes, and wash your hands:

• hot water cylinder

• toilet cistern – as long as no chemical toilet cleaner is present

• bottled water

• spa/swimming pool – can use to wash yourself and your family.

Boil or purify water before using it in food preparation, and to avoid cross-contamination of food. Once boiled, cover and store in a clean container and place in the fridge (if it’s working) or in some other cool place. Re-boil the water if it is not used within 24 hours.

If you do not have power to boil water then purifying tablets or bleach can be added to ensure its safety. Add five drops of household bleach per litre of water and leave for 30 minutes.

## After an emergency: ensure food is safe

Knowing what is safe to eat during the ‘clean-up’ phase after an emergency can become a guessing game. Understand what may or may not be safe to eat:

• any food that retains ice crystals and where the packaging has not been damaged or opened can be safely refrozen

• foods that have been defrosted can still be used if they have just recently defrosted and can be kept cold, ie the fridge is working again

• defrosted food cannot be refrozen

• inspect the food – does it smell or appear different? (Has the colour changed and does it have a slimy texture?), if so it is probably unsafe to eat

• do not use any tinned food that has been damaged (for example if the can has split seams or has been punctured).

You should always be prepared for a disaster. If you follow the guidelines above, they may help prevent you or your family from becoming ill.

Food safety is just one step in staying safe during and after an emergency. To find out more visit the Civil Defence website: <http://www.civildefence.govt.nz/memwebsite.nsf>

## Before the next disaster strikes: prepare a survival kit

There are many things you can do to minimise the impact on your health before disaster strikes. Put together an emergency food survival kit. Do it now and make sure you include the following items to last at least three days:

• canned and/or dried food – luncheon meat, ham, fish, fruits, vegetables, cereals, tea, coffee, powdered soup, salt, sugar, sweets, biscuits

• a can opener

• a primus/portable gas cooker or barbeque to cook on

• eating equipment – utensils, knives, pots, cups, plates, bowls, matches, lighters

• bottled water – 3 litres per person per day, or 6 to 8 large plastic soft-drink bottles of water per person per day

• bottled water – 1 litre for washing food and cooking each meal, washing dishes and washing yourself

• milk powder or UHT milk.

Check and renew food and water every year, taking into account medical or dietary conditions in your family. If you have babies or children, make sure they have enough suitable food.

If you live in a flood-prone area, keep your food survival kit above the likely reach of flood water.

For more emergency-related food safety information phone 0800 693 721 or go to [www.foodsafety.govt.nz](http://www.foodsafety.govt.nz)