

November 2013

Emergency Preparedness Pointers

Picking The Perfect 72 Hour Food Combinations

Fall has arrived and the crisp air and falling leaves let everyone know that the holiday season is right around the corner. It is a time of year when a lot of meal planning and food shopping takes place. Is this the year a new recipe will be used instead of an age old favorite? This thinking needs to go beyond just holiday meal preparation; it needs to extend to the 72 hour kit. There are many alternatives available in the world of shelf stable foods and finding the right type or combination of types for a three day supply requires planning.



72 Hour Kit Food Options



As with any food product, it is very important to read the label and check expiration dates. Food stored in a cool, dry place will last longer than foods that are exposed to either extreme heat or cold.

- ▶ Shelf stable products (canned or air tight packaging) - 12-18 month shelf life
- ▶ Dehydrated food - 3-25 year shelf life (depending on product and how/where it is stored)
- ▶ Freeze dried food - 5-25 year shelf life (depending on product and how/where it is stored)
- ▶ Meals Ready To Eat (MRE) - 2-10 year shelf life (depending on product and how/where it is stored)

Things To Consider

Is It Tasty? Foul-tasting food is no way to top off a really bad day. Whether sheltering in place or evacuating for a disaster, the situation is stressful. Activity levels may be very high after the incident and staying hydrated and nourished will be vital. All food packed in a 72 hour kit should be food that tastes good to the owner. This is why it is important to taste test food before it becomes part of the kit. Taking a variety of potential foods camping is a great way to help determine what works and what doesn't.

Hot or Cold? Some foods need to be hot to be edible (i.e. some MREs) and others are designed to be eaten at room temperature (i.e. granola bars). There is a lot to be said for a warm meal during a cold disaster; there is also much to be said for a quick meal that requires no preparation when you're in a hurry to evacuate. A 72 hour kit may have to have more than one type of food product during its three days of use. Including multiple types of foods may provide the greatest flexibility of use and diversity of flavor. Also consider if you are willing to eat a food either hot or cold. Some foods are palatable either way.

What's Between Opening And Eating? This is an essential consideration because it affects what other items need to be included in the 72 hour kit. Examine the preparation steps for each item.

- ▶ Does it need a can opener or some other special device to open it?
- ▶ Does it need a heat source to prepare? Does it need a pot to be cooked in?
- ▶ Does it require water to prepare? How much extra water must be added to the kit for cooking?
- ▶ Can it be prepared under adverse circumstances? How long will it take to prepare?

How Much Is There? Some foods come in large cans as a way of saving money per portion. Once the can is open, is there a way to preserve the unused portions? In the case of dehydrated or freeze dried foods, most have a way to close/seal the can again. However, once the can has been opened the shelf life is reduced. Canned foods like soups, fruits or vegetables make portion control very important. Once one of these cans is opened, the contents will need to be consumed in one sitting if there is no way to keep leftovers cold. The same is true for many of the foods that come in pouches. While it may not be the most economical, single serving containers could be the easiest option for individual 72 hour kits.

Weight Matters. If the 72 hour is being kept in a backpack, keeping it light is important. Water may be the heaviest but most important resource to carry. Food options, like MREs, come with their own heat source in the package and do not require anything else to prepare. Other options like meal bars, dehydrated or freeze dried fruits are light and do not require any cooking. Keep in mind, food is only one element of a 72 hour kit. This is why finding the balance between nutrition, taste and weight is important.

