

Bulletin #9001, Preparing Food During a Power Failure

Preparing Food During a Power Failure

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During a power failure, cooking and eating habits must change to fit the situation. You may have no heat, no refrigeration and limited water. In addition, there are greater health risks from eating contaminated or spoiled food. When preparing food during a power outage, conserve fuel, conserve water and take health precautions.

Conserve Fuel

Consider the amount of cooking time needed for each food. If you have limited heat for cooking, choose foods that cook quickly. Alternate cooking methods include:

- **Propane camp stoves or grills** (for outside cooking only). These can be used any time of the year. Use foil to wrap a variety of foods, including vegetables, for easy cooking and cleanup. Grill and toast other foods as you would for a barbeque. Make sure you close the propane tank when you're done cooking to prevent gas from escaping during cold weather.
- **Fireplace.** Many foods can be skewered, grilled or wrapped in foil and cooked in a fireplace.
- **Candle warmers and fondue pots.** These may be used if no other heat sources are available. Use safety precautions with these devices.
- **Wood stove.** Cooking on top of the wood stove may be an option. Depending on the amount of heat you have available, preparing one-dish meals, breads and soups may be possible.

Do not cook frozen foods unless you have ample heat for cooking. Most frozen foods need a lot more cooking time than fresh or canned foods. Also, if power is off, it is best to leave the freezer door closed to keep food from thawing.

Conserve Water

Save liquids from canned vegetables. Substitute these for water in cooked dishes. Drain and save liquids from canned fruits, too. Use these for water in salads and vegetables.

Take Health Precautions

Here are some tips for ensuring the health of your family during a power outage:

- Boil all water used in food preparation for at least 10 minutes.
- If you are without refrigeration, open only enough food for one meal. Some foods can be kept a short time without refrigeration. In an emergency, cooked vegetables, cooked meats and meat dishes can be kept unrefrigerated for two hours. Do not keep these dishes overnight without refrigeration.

- Do not serve foods that spoil easily, such as ground meats, creamed foods, hash, custards, meat pies and any food containing mayonnaise. These are potential sources of botulism poisoning and other food borne pathogens.
- When feeding babies and toddlers, open fresh foods for each meal. There may be waste, but safety is important.
- If necessary, substitute canned and powdered milk for fresh milk. Canned milk will keep safely for a few hours after you open the can. Use only boiled or disinfected water to mix powdered milk. Use powdered milk immediately after it is mixed. If you are using canned formula to feed your baby, use ready-to-use or mix only enough for one feeding. Never use formula that is not stored cooled and refrigerated.
- If safe water or water disinfecting materials is not available, use canned or bottled fruit juices instead of water.
- Prepare and eat foods in their original containers, if possible. This will help if dishwashing is not possible.

For more information on emergency preparedness, contact your [UMaine Extension county office](#).

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