

ARE YOU READY?



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Preparedness tips for older adults and caregivers



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Emergency preparedness plans can work best when they're tailored to individual needs. Such is the case for older adults, some of whom should take special precautions and may require extra help to stay safe in a disaster.

Plan ahead

Preparing for a disaster before it strikes is critical, especially for disasters that can happen suddenly and with little warning, such as tornadoes or earthquakes.

First, do the research. What kinds of natural disasters can happen in your community? Is there a chance you'll be instructed to evacuate, and where are the evacuation routes? Where are the closest shelters, and will those shelters meet my needs? For example, many shelters do not allow pets while other shelters are equipped to care for evacuees with special medical needs.



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Everyone, no matter their age, needs to prepare an emergency kit for their home. As you prepare your kit, think about your daily needs and what might happen if your access to regular resources, such as a pharmacy, were cut off. Basic kit components include a flashlight, a first aid kit, extra batteries, a battery-operated radio, bottled water, nonperishable food and a manual can opener. Make sure to also stock extra medical supplies, such as hearing aid batteries, extra glasses or blood sugar testing equipment.



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Also include an emergency supply of prescription medicines — try to stockpile enough for at least two weeks. Talk to your doctor about if and how you can ration your medicine if you start to run out and can't get more. Can you take half a dose? Can you take it every other day? Consult your doctor before making this decision. It's also a good idea to put a copy of your medical records as well as a list of prescriptions you take and contact information for your physicians in your stockpile kit.

Keep all of your medical-related emergency supplies together in a waterproof container. This will make them easy to grab if you have to evacuate.

Communication is key

It's important to create a support network, especially if you will need assistance in an emergency. If you will be unable to take action in a disaster, it is critical that you make plans ahead of time.

Start by identifying a friend or family member that you know you can count on and share your emergency plans with them. Let someone in your support network know where your emergency medical supplies are kept and consider giving her or him a key to your house. You can even designate a "preparedness buddy" who will check on you during an emergency to make sure you are okay. Keep the contact information for those in your support network up to date so you aren't searching for phone numbers during an emergency.



Photo courtesy iStockphoto—Sarah Garner

If you believe you'll need help during a disaster, such as getting a ride to a shelter, call and let local emergency officials know long before something happens. This is a good idea even if you've already made plans with friends or family. Many emergency response agencies keep lists of residents who'll need help in an emergency. Such officials can also tell you if shelters will be available for residents with special medical needs.

If you live in a nursing home or assisted living facility, consider asking officials about their emergency preparedness plans. Do they have plans for both sheltering in place as well as evacuation? Is there a designated shelter the facility will evacuate to? How will they notify you in case of a disaster?



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