

Disasters and Food Safety

Meals Without Electricity



During extended power outages, adequate nutrition is still important. Put together nutritious meals, even when access to refrigeration or electric appliances is unavailable for days or weeks.

Try To Keep a Normal Routine

Continue to eat at regular times, choose nutritious foods that cover a variety of food groups, and include a mixture of colors.

Use Portable Equipment Safely

Camping, gas, or outdoor grills are useful for preparing meals when the power is out. Be sure to use these safely.

Meal Planning Without Electricity

Visit [MyPlate.gov](https://www.myplate.gov) and use the model to help plan meals based on food groups. Also, see meal ideas below that do not require power.

Eat Perishables First

If the power is not returning for several hours or days, plan to eat perishable foods first and non-perishable foods later. Refer to power outage materials to learn how long foods can be stored and how to use ice packs and coolers to extend the time foods can remain at safe temperatures.

Use Clean Water

Wash hands before preparing food and wash fresh fruits and vegetables before eating. During a power outage, drinking water should still be available. But if it is not, use bottles or jugs of water.

Cook Small To Avoid Leftovers

When refrigerators and freezers are not working, plan to cook in small batches, as leftovers cannot be saved unless power returns soon after making a recipe.

Avoid opening multiple containers of canned or bottled foods, as many of these foods become perishable once opened.



Learn Which Foods Can Safely Remain Unrefrigerated

For example, fresh, uncut fruits and vegetables can be stored at room temperature. Once cut, their leftovers need to be refrigerated.

If internet access is available, visit [foodsafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov) or download the FoodKeeper app for full lists.

Breakfast Ideas

- **Dry cereal and milk with canned peaches.** Use milk within 4 hours of power outage or use powdered or ultra-high temperature milk, which needs to be refrigerated after opening.
- **Yogurt and fresh berries with granola.** Use yogurt within 4 hours of when the power goes out. Wash berries with water before eating.
- **Avocado bread with applesauce.** Top whole-grain bread with sliced avocados and black pepper; serve with canned applesauce.
- **Bagel and banana.** Spread peanut butter on a whole-grain bagel and top with sliced bananas.

Lunch Ideas

- **Salad and sandwich.** Open and drain a can of chickpeas. Mash with avocado, onion, and dry spices. Serve on bread or crackers.
- **Tuna and crackers.** Drain canned or foil-packed tuna and eat with whole-grain crackers.
- **Cold taco salad.** Drain canned chicken, black beans, and corn. Mix with bottled salsa and serve with tortillas or tortilla chips.
- **Easy lunch box.** Munch on cheese sticks, whole-grain crackers, sliced bell pepper with shelf-stable ranch dressing cups, and raisins.

Dinner Ideas

- **Deli sandwich wraps and fresh fruit.** Add deli meat, cheese, veggies, and condiments to tortillas. Use deli meats, cheeses, and opened, refrigerated condiments within 4 hours of a power outage.
- **Asian-inspired bulgur salad.** Requires boiling water. Cook the bulgur by pouring boiling water over it and letting it sit for 15 minutes. Mix in chopped almonds, canned apricots, chicken or beans, and chow mein noodles. Top with rice wine vinegar and oil.
- **Cobb salad or eggless option.** Add drained canned chicken, avocado slices, sliced tomato, and pre-cooked bacon bits to a plate of lettuce. Serve with whole-wheat crackers. If hardboiled eggs are available, add them to the salad. Remember to wash all produce before eating.
- **Picnic plate.** Eat picnic-style with pieces of summer sausage, cheese, olives, nuts, pieces of dark chocolate, pita bread, snap peas, and mandarin oranges. Once packages are opened, use sausage, cheese, and olives within 4 hours of when the power goes out. Remember to wash all produce before eating.

Snack Ideas

- **Celery and apple slices with peanut butter.** Remember to wash all produce before eating.
- **Grapes and jerky.** Remember to wash all produce before eating.
- **Trail mix of dried fruit, nuts, and dry cereal.**
- **Tortilla chips and packaged salsa.**

Call Your Local Office

Contact your local Illinois Extension office with your food safety questions: go.illinois.edu/FindILExtension.

References

- [Preparing Food Without Power](#), University of Minnesota Extension.
- [Preparing Food During Power Outages](#), North Dakota State University Extension.
- [Hurricane Preparedness: Meal and Menu Planning](#), University of Florida.

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