



# DISASTER PREPAREDNESS FOR SENIORS

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# Disaster Preparedness for Seniors

## Tips for Preparedness for the Senior Population

### Introduction

When planning for large scale emergency situations, it's easy to forget that some segments of the population have special needs that go beyond the average and require more than a survival kit and an evacuation plan. Many elderly and disabled persons have very specific medical needs. These needs must be met regardless of external happenings. Limited mobility, access to and frailties from pre-existing conditions are only some of the many possible complications faced by the elderly and disabled. These factors can often be life-threatening if left unattended.

As the percentage of elderly and frail members of society grows, and an increasing number of patients receive treatment in home care or nursing facilities, it can be difficult to ensure that proper medical treatment will continue to be administered in a disaster scenario. Responsibility for the care of elderly members of society during fires, floods, hurricanes and earthquakes is split between the family and friends of the elderly, the healthcare system, and the community as a whole.

Emergencies and disasters can strike quickly and without warning and can force you to evacuate your neighborhood or be confined to your home. What would you do if your basic services—water; gas; electricity or communications were cut off?

Learn how to protect yourself and cope with disaster by planning ahead. Even if you have physical limitations, you can still protect and prepare yourself. Local officials and relief workers may not be able to reach everyone right away. You can deal with disaster better by preparing in advance and by working with those in your support network: your family, neighbors and friends.

Knowing what to do is your responsibility. This is a guide to being more prepared. There are three steps to preparedness.

- Get a 72 hour Kit
- Make a Plan
- Be Informed

Disasters can happen at any moment. By planning ahead, you can avoid waiting in long lines for critical supplies, such as food, water and medicine, and you will also have the essential items if you need to evacuate.

- For your safety and comfort, have a disaster supplies kit packed and ready in one place before a disaster hits.
- Assemble enough supplies to last for at least three days.
- Store your supplies in one or more easy-to-carry containers, such as a backpack or duffel bag.
- You may want to consider storing supplies in a container that has wheels.

- Be sure your bag has an ID tag.
- Label any equipment, such as wheelchairs, canes or walkers that you would need with your name, address and phone numbers.
- Keeping your kit up-to-date is also important. Review the contents at least every six months or as your needs change. Check expiration dates and shift your stored supplies into everyday use before they expire. Replace food, water and batteries, and refresh medications and other perishable items with “first in, first out” practices.

## Get a 72 Hour Kit

The following are some suggestions for building your 72 hour kit. These are only suggestions; you should include any additional items that you feel might be useful for your particular needs.

### Basic Needs and Supplies *(check list)*

- A three-day supply of nonperishable food *(It is a good idea to include foods that do not need to be cooked (canned, dried, etc.).*
- Three-day supply of water *(one gallon per person, per day)*
- Battery-operated or crank-powered radio
- Flashlight with extra batteries and bulbs *(do not use candles)*
- First aid kit and manual
- Sanitation and hygiene items *(toilet paper, feminine products)*
- Matches in waterproof container
- Cell phone with an extra battery and charger
- Whistle *(to attract the attention of emergency personnel)*
- Change of clothing
- Blanket
- Manual can opener
- Photocopies of personal documents/identification
- Insurance agent’s name and number
- Cash and coins *(ATMs may not be accessible)*
- Pet supplies *(including food and vaccination records)*
- Map of the local area
- Extra set of keys *(car, house, etc.)*
- Plastic garbage bags
- Family and friends’ emergency contact information
- Pack of cards to provide entertainment and pass the time

### Cold Climate Supplies *(check list)*

It is possible that you will not have heat during or after a disaster. Think about your clothing and bedding needs. Be sure to include one set of the following for each person:

- Jacket or coat
- Long pants and long-sleeve shirt
- Sturdy shoes
- Hat, mittens and scarf

- Sleeping bag or warm blanket

### Supplies for Your Vehicle (*check list*)

- Flashlight with extra batteries and extra bulbs
- Maps
- First aid kit and manual
- Tire repair kit
- Jumper cables
- Flares
- Bottled water
- Non-perishable foods such as granola bars
- *Winter:* Blanket, hat, mittens, shovel, sand, tire chains, windshield scraper, florescent distress flag
- *Summer:* Sunscreen lotion SPF 15 or higher, shade item (umbrella, wide-brimmed hat.)

### Medications and Medical Emergency Supplies

In the event that a disaster hits and an individual with special medical needs is separated from his or her caregiver, it's important for them to be able to make others aware of their conditions. Medical bracelets and other visible cues can help alert members of the public to individuals with medical needs so that they can then help them get the necessary treatment for their and any other important medical data. Registering with special needs registries in your local area can also help officials recognize individuals with special medical needs more quickly.

### Designated contacts to provide assistance

In order to make sure that patients with special medical needs are taken care of in an emergency situation, a set of designated contacts should be established who will be responsible for their assistance. These contacts could be family members, members of the community, or paid healthcare providers. Contacts can take responsibility for any number of duties, including transportation, administration of essential medications, or general assistance. Adding clear accountability makes contacts feel responsible and avoids situations where the elderly and disabled are disregarded and left to be "someone else's problem".

### Create a Support Network

- If you anticipate needing assistance during a disaster talk to family, friends and others who will be part of your personal support network.
- Write down and share each aspect of your emergency plan with everyone in your support network.
- Make sure everyone knows how you plan to evacuate your home or workplace and where you will go in case of a disaster.

- Make sure that someone in your local network has an extra key to your home and knows where you keep your emergency supplies.
- Teach those who will help you how to use any lifesaving equipment, administer medicine in case of an emergency.
- Practice your plan with those who have agreed to be part of your network.

### Other Items You Might Need

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### Make a Plan

The next time a disaster strikes, you may not have much time to act. Planning ahead reduces anxiety. Prepare now for a sudden emergency and remember to review your plan regularly. Meet with your family and friends. Explain your concerns to your family and support network and work with them as a team to prepare. Arrange for someone to check on you at the time of a disaster. Be sure to include any caregivers in your meeting and planning efforts.

Assess yourself and your household. What personal abilities and limitations may affect your response to a disaster? Think about how you can resolve these and discuss them with your family and friends. Details are important to ensure your plan fits your needs. Practice the planned actions to make sure everything works.

### Family Communications Plan

- Carry family contact information in your wallet.
- Choose an out-of-town contact person. After a disaster, it is often easier to make a long-distance call than a local call.

### Community Disaster Plans

- Ask about the emergency plans and procedures that exist in your community.
- Know about your community’s response and evacuation plans (e.g., nuclear emergency, severe weather). If you do not own a vehicle or drive, find out in advance what your community’s plans are for evacuating those without private transportation or make arrangements with a neighbor who would drive you.

If you receive home care, speak with your case manager to see what their plan is in times of emergency and how they can assist with your plan.

## If You Need To Evacuate

- Coordinate evacuation procedures with your home care provider
- Car pool if possible
- If you need special transportation call the American Red Cross or your local officials
- Wear appropriate clothing and sturdy shoes
- Take your disaster supplies kit
- Lock your home
- Use the travel routes specified or special assistance provided by local officials. Don't take any short cuts, they may be unsafe.
- Notify shelter authorities of any needs you may have. They will do their best to accommodate you and make you comfortable.

## If You Are Sure You Have Enough Time

- Shut off water, gas and electricity if instructed to do so and if you know how. Gas must be turned back on by a professional.
- Let others know when you left and where you are going.
- Make arrangements for pets. Animals other than working animals may not be allowed in public shelters.
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## Escape Routes and Meeting Places

### Make a Plan

- Plan the best and quickest escape routes out of your home and evacuation routes out of your neighborhood.
- Decide on a meeting place outside your neighborhood in case you cannot return home.
- If you or someone in your household uses a wheelchair, make sure all escape routes from your home are wheelchair accessible.
- Know the safe places within your home in case you need to shelter during extreme weather events.
- Practice your escape drill every six months.
- Plan for transportation in case you need to evacuate to a shelter.

## Post Emergency Phone Numbers near Your Phones

Post emergency numbers near all of your phones. Include the numbers of those in your support network. Remember that in some emergencies, telephone lines might not be working.

Consider having alternative plans for contacting those in your network.

## Plan for Those with Disabilities

Keep support items like wheelchairs and walkers in a designated place so they can be found quickly. This step is essential for those who have home-health caregivers, particularly for those who are bed bound.

## Plan for Your Pets or Service Animals

Take your pets with you if you evacuate; however, be aware that pets (except service animals) are not permitted in emergency public shelters for health reasons. Prepare a list of family, friends, boarding facilities, veterinarians and 'pet-friendly' hotels that could shelter your pets in an emergency.

Don't forget you will need food and medicine for your pets as well.

## Utilities

Talk to your utility company about emergency procedures and know how and when to turn off water, gas and electricity at the main switches or valves. Share this information with your family. Keep any tools you will need nearby. Turn off the utilities only if you suspect the lines are damaged, you suspect a leak or if local officials instruct you to do so. (*Note:* If gas is turned off for any reason, only a qualified professional can turn it back on. It could take several weeks for a professional to respond.

## Smoke Alarms and Carbon Monoxide Alarms

Test your smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms regularly. Consider strobe or vibrating alert systems that might meet your needs. Change the batteries in all alarms at least once a year or according to the manufacturer's instructions.

## Insurance Coverage

Talk with your insurance agent to be sure that you have adequate insurance coverage. Homeowners insurance does not cover flood damage and may not provide full coverage for other hazards.

## Vital Records and Documents

Keep copies of vital family records and other important documents such as birth and marriage certificates, social security cards, passports, wills, deeds, and financial, insurance and immunizations records in a safe location like a fire safe or safe-deposit box.



## Hearing Aids/Cochlear Implants

If you wear hearing aids or assistive devices, consider storing them in a bedside container that is attached to your nightstand using Velcro. Some disasters (e.g., earthquakes) may shift items that are not secured, making them difficult to find quickly.

## Maintain Your Kit and Practice Your Plan

Every six months

- Review your plan with all of your friends and family.
- Check your disaster supplies kit and refresh all expiring items (e.g., food, water, medications and batteries).
- Conduct fire and emergency evacuation drills on a regular basis with your family. Make sure all your plans work.

At least once a year

- Change the batteries in all essential devices at the same time each year. (e.g., smoke alarms).



## Be Informed

### Community Hazard Assessment

What hazards threaten your community and neighborhood?

Make a list of how they might affect you. Think about both natural (e.g., hurricanes, flooding, winter storms and earthquakes) and human-caused (e.g., hazardous materials and transportation accidents) and about your risk from those hazards.

Which of these hazards are most likely to happen in your community?

Winter Storms	Flooding	Toxic Spills
Wildfires	Earthquakes	Home Fires
Thunderstorms	Tornadoes	Hurricanes

Preparing for a hazard before it happens, will help you be prepared for any disaster. Remember, disasters can happen at any time. Ask yourself the following questions.

- Do you live alone?
- Do you drive or own a car?
- How good is your sense of smell?
- Do you have any physical, medical, thinking or learning limitations?
- Has your sense of hearing or vision decreased?
- Are you reliant upon any medical equipment?
- Are you reliant upon a caregiver?

## **Community Warning Systems**

### **How will you be notified of a possible emergency?**

Know how local authorities will warn you of a pending or current disaster situation and how they will provide information to you before, during and after a disaster.

## **Local Neighborhood Emergency Teams**

Connect with a group in your local neighborhood. Some of these could include CERT (Community Emergency Response Team), neighborhood watch, community block associations, faith-based organizations, etc. Even if you feel you cannot become a member, let them know your needs and ask them how they could assist with your disaster plan. If available, take advantage of advance registration systems in your area for those who need help during community emergencies.

## **Local Fire Departments**

Connect with your local fire department or ambulance and let them know your needs (especially if you live in a rural area). Discuss with them how they might be able to assist in your disaster plan.

## **Local EAS (Emergency Alert System)**

Certain television and radio stations will broadcast emergency messages from local authorities. Find out which radio and TV stations broadcast on the Emergency Alert System (EAS). In Utah County these would be:

KBYU - 89.1 FM or 89.5 FM  
KSL – 1160 AM

## **NOAA Weather Radio/All-Hazard Alert Radio**

These special radios provide one of the earliest warnings of weather and other emergencies and can be programmed to alert you to hazards in your specific area. Call your local National Weather Service office or visit [www.nws.noaa.gov](http://www.nws.noaa.gov) for more information.

### **Door--to-Door Warning From Local Emergency Officials**

In some emergencies local responders may come door-to-door and deliver emergency messages or warnings. Listen carefully and follow their instructions!

### **Senior Living and Assisted Living Communities**

If you live in a senior community become familiar with any disaster notification plans that may already exist. Talk to your community management or resident council about how you can all be more prepared together.

### **Be Aware—Help Inform Others**

There may be people in your community that need extra assistance when a disaster occurs. Consider how you can assist them in their preparedness planning and during an emergency.



## **When Disaster Strikes**

### **Sheltering In Place vs. Staying at Home**

In some emergencies such as a chemical emergency, you need to know how to seal a room for safety on a temporary basis, called “shelter in place.” Information on sheltering in place can be found at [ReadyUtah.gov](http://ReadyUtah.gov). In the case of a winter storm, you may be told to stay at home. This means stay where you are and make yourself as safe as possible until the emergency passes or you are told to evacuate. In this situation, it is safer to remain indoors than to go outside. Stay in your home and listen to instructions from emergency personnel. Listen to your television or radio for emergency messages. Be prepared to be on your own and have additional food and water for seven to fourteen days.

### **If You Need to Evacuate**

Coordinate with your family and home care provider for evacuation procedures shown on page 8.

## Public Shelters

Relief organizations like the American Red Cross and the Salvation Army may open shelters if a disaster affects a large number of people or the emergency is expected to last several days. Be prepared to go to a shelter if;

- Your area is without electrical power.
- Floodwater is rising.
- Your home has been severely damaged.
- Police or other local officials tell you to evacuate.



## Services Provided at Most Shelters

- Food
- Temporary shelter
- Basic first aid
- Most emergency services are provided free of charge

To learn about shelters that have been opened in your area, listen to your local media, check with your local United Way office, dial 2-1-1 or visit [www.unitedway.org](http://www.unitedway.org).

## Immediately After a Disaster

If the emergency occurs while you are at home, check for damage using a flashlight. **DO NOT** light matches or candles or turn on electrical switches. Check for fires, chemical spills and gas leaks.

- Shut off any damaged utilities.
- Check on your neighbors, especially those who are elderly or have disabilities.
- Call your out-of-town contacts and let them know you are okay. Stay away from downed power lines.
- Do not drive through flooded roads.

- Monitor local broadcasts for information about where you can get disaster relief assistance.

### If Electrical Power Is Lost

- Use a flashlight or battery-operated lantern. *Do not use candles.*
- Turn off or unplug all major appliances (e.g., stove, refrigerator, and dryer). They could be damaged by the electrical surge when the power is restored.
- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible.
- Use portable generators cautiously. Make sure they are operated only outdoors in a well-ventilated area. Refuel a generator only after it has cooled. Do not connect a generator to your home’s electrical system except through an approved transfer switch installed in compliance with the local electrical code.

### Financial Exploitation/Scams

Unfortunately, after a disaster, some people may try to take advantage of your vulnerability. Beware of high-pressure sales, disclosing personal financial information (account numbers and credit card information) and services provided with no written contract. If you believe that some is trying to scam you, contact your local police department or better business association. For information on scams, go to [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov).

## FIRE

### Before a Fire

- Plan two escape routes out of each room. Choose a place to meet outside.
- Practice your fire escape with everyone in your home every six months.
- Plan to use the stairs during a fire evacuation, even in buildings with elevators. If you cannot use stairs, make special arrangements for help in advance.
- Sleep with the bedroom door closed.
- Install smoke alarms inside and outside sleeping areas to give you warning of toxic fumes.
- Test your smoke alarm every month.
- Change batteries on the same day each year. Vacuum it occasionally to remove dust. Replace smoke alarms every ten years—they lose sensitivity over time.

### In Case of Fire



**Remain calm.** Drop to the floor and crawl. Most fire fatalities are due to breathing toxic fumes and smoke. The cleanest air is near the floor. Breathing toxic fumes and smoke is more dangerous than the risk of injury in getting to the floor quickly.

- Feel any door before you open it. If it is hot, find another way out.
- If your smoke alarm sounds, never waste time to get dressed or collect valuables or pets. Get out of your home immediately. Do not try to fight the fire! Call for help from a neighbor's phone.
- **Never go back into a burning building for any reason. Get out and stay out!**
- If your clothes catch on fire, drop to the floor and roll to suffocate the fire. Keep rolling (running from the fire only "fans" the flames and makes it worse).
- If you are in a wheelchair or cannot get out of your home, stay by the window near the floor and signal for help.

## Grandparents and Grandchildren

It is estimated that 3.4 million children live in a household headed by grandparents. Many children visit their grandparents often. The following safety advice for children can help grandparents prepare a safe environment at home for children:

- Store matches and lighters in high, locked cabinets, away from children.
- Install plastic covers over all exposed electrical outlets.
- Move cleaning chemicals like cleansers, soap, drain cleaner and other poisons to high cupboards or install a childproof lock if you must keep these items in low cabinets.
- Store prescription medicines and over the-counter drugs like aspirin, cough medicines and stomachache remedies in a cabinet out of reach of children.
- If children are playing outside or in a pool when skies grow dark or you hear thunder, have them come indoors right away.

## Children Can Help Grandparents Too

- Have children test each smoke alarm in your home to make sure it is working by using a broom handle to push the test button.
- Ask children to draw a floor plan of your home and show two ways out of every room in case of fire.
- Ask your grandchildren to help you assemble your disaster supplies kit and get them to assemble one for their family at the same time.

## Home Caregivers—Special Considerations

Prepare a disaster supplies kit for any family member who cannot do so on their own. If this person receives home care, speak with the case manager to see what the agency's role is in case of an emergency at home or if evacuation is indicated.

Develop home fire escape and evacuation plans and practice them every month in case of fire and other disasters particular to your area.

Enlist the assistance of other caregivers if possible. Find out what provisions are available in your area in case evacuation is needed, especially if your family member requires an uninterrupted power source for survival.

## **Your Role when Disaster Strikes**

Know that you may be directed to a hospital or a medical or functional support shelter and you may need to continue caring for that person during the emergency situation. Be sure to make your back-up assistants and family members aware of all emergency plans.

## **Emotional and Psychological Effects**

Disasters often cause emotional distress. Being prepared will lessen your anxiety. When an emergency occurs, know that you may experience some emotional, physical, mental and spiritual reactions.

### **Some typical physical reactions**

- Stomachaches
- Difficulty sleeping/fatigue
- Headaches
- Appetite disturbances
- A worsening of chronic medical conditions like arthritis, diabetes or high-blood pressure

### **Some typical emotional reactions**

- Sadness
- Depression
- Excessive anxiety
- Irritability and anger
- Emotional numbness

### **Some typical mental reactions**

- Confusion
- Disorientation
- Memory problems
- Lack of focus and concentration
- Difficulty making decisions

### **Some typical spiritual reactions**

- Anger with God
- Questioning one's own spiritual beliefs

- An increase in prayer
- A need to find spiritual reasons for the disaster
- A need to be comforted by spiritual leaders

When a disaster occurs, it can remind you of previous events in your life. Remember what you did then to help you get through it and see if it works now. Sometimes this new disaster seems like the final straw. If you find memories bring up old grief, sadness, fear and anger, it can be distressing. Try to separate your reactions to previous events from what is happening now. Remember that you were able to cope last time and remind yourself you can cope now.

## Disaster Recovery

In the unsettled days and weeks following a disaster, people whose lives have been disrupted must make many decisions that may be confusing and difficult to sort out. People of all ages can be overwhelmed by the mounds of information thrown at them in a short period of time.

In disaster situations, scam artists are often ready to take advantage of the misfortunes of others. The elderly are perhaps the most vulnerable to strangers presenting a range of services. If you are affected by damage from disasters, you should be aware that dishonest contractors might take advantage of you. Victims who receive offers that seem “too good to refuse” should ask for references, get a second estimate and check with relatives or friends. Ask for advice before signing anything. It is suggested that you should not sign a contract or make payment in advance.

The elderly are also at high-risk for emotional stress from disaster. Common reactions caused or aggravated by disasters can include depression, irritability, anger, trouble sleeping or eating, family discord, restlessness and substance abuse. Identifying these problem areas and getting help now will help prevent larger debilitating problems in the future.

Studies show that older people:

- Are often slower to register for disaster assistance, and once they are registered, may not follow through and complete the necessary applications to obtain assistance.
- May be at higher nutritional risk in the aftermath of a disaster and may forget to take necessary medications.
- Are often targeted by fraudulent contractors and “con men” that follow disasters and financially exploit disaster victims.
- May be susceptible to physical and mental abuse as family stressed increases in later stages of the disaster.
- Are less likely than younger generations to use formal aid sources such as FEMA or the Red Cross.
- Have slower economic recovery.
- Suffer a pattern of neglect in the receiving social support after a natural disaster.
- Have more health problems after disasters.
- Do not necessarily comply with disaster warnings.

The elderly population may experience a number of common ailments that may become worse in a disaster situation, including heart disease, cancer, stroke, arthritis, poor vision and hearing, depression and dementia. Understanding the high risk in the elderly population is paramount. Particular attention should be paid to possible vision deficit, hearing loss, cognitive changes, and acute illness. Precautions should be taken to prevent new or further injuries from falling during relocation.

The Administration on Aging (AOA) responds to the special needs of older disaster victims. Older people often have difficulty obtaining necessary assistance because of progressive physical and mental impairments and other frailties that often accompany aging. Many older people who live on limited incomes and sometimes alone often find it impossible to recover from disasters without special federal assistance services.

Recognizing this, Congress addressed disaster response for older people in the Older Americans Act, authorizing the (AOA) to provide limited financial assistance for services through State Agencies on Aging... When a disaster strikes, the (AOA's) National Disaster Preparedness and Response Office coordinates activities with FEMA and State Emergency Management Agencies, and works closely with private disaster response organizations such as the American Red Cross and the Salvation Army. Together these organizations obtain exchange information on the impact of the disaster on older people in their communities. AOA's national aging network is poised to assist older people, providing critical support such as meals and transportation, information about temporary housing and other important services upon which frail older adults often rely.

Beware of Dishonest Repairmen- this advice is especially important for elderly citizens.

Older people and their family can call the AOA's National Eldercare Locator toll-free number at 1-800-677-1116 to learn about available services.

### Useful Web Sites

American Red Cross [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)  
Department of Homeland Security [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov)  
National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration  
[www.noaa.gov](http://www.noaa.gov)  
[www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)  
[www.beready.utah.gov](http://www.beready.utah.gov)  
AARP [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org)

For more information, please contact your local emergency management office, [www.unitedwayuc.org](http://www.unitedwayuc.org) or Red Cross Chapter.

## Additional Specific Information You Might Need

Record your local emergency numbers below.

### Important Numbers

2-1-1 Emergency Information

Emergency Contact Information Police:

Fire department:

Ambulance agency:

Family doctor:

Poison Control Center: 1-800-222-1222

Name:

Home address:

Family members' contact information