



How to Build a Home Emergency Kit

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How to Build a Home Emergency Kit: 4 Simple Steps

Skill level: Beginner

Time estimate: Varies by household size, needs, and how much you already have on hand.

Progress: Plan → Gather → Pack → Maintain

Introduction & Overview

A home emergency kit keeps essential supplies together for disruptions such as severe weather, power outages, or evacuation. It helps your household manage basic needs when stores, utilities, or other services are unavailable. A useful kit is not one-size-fits-all: it should reflect who lives in your home, their health and access needs, and the emergencies common in your area.

Ready.gov recommends planning for several days without outside help and keeping a full kit at home, with smaller portable kits in places such as a vehicle or workplace. The American Red Cross distinguishes between a portable Go-Kit for evacuation and a larger Stay-at-Home Kit. Its guidance calls for at least three days of supplies in a Go-Kit and at least two weeks in a home kit. These are useful planning targets, not a reason to delay starting: build your supplies over time if needed.

This guide walks you through choosing supplies, storing them safely, and keeping them current. You'll also find ways to adapt your kit for children, older adults, and pets. Begin with what you already have, then fill the gaps that matter most to your household.



A practical kit combines household supplies with items tailored to the people and pets who rely on them.

Materials & Tools Required

Use this list as a starting point, then adapt it to your household and local risks. The amounts of water, food, and medication depend on the number of people, the length of time you are planning for, and individual needs. The cited guidance below gives specific planning targets for water, food, and medications.

Emergency supplies checklist

- **Water:** Plan for one gallon per person per day. The Red Cross recommends a three-day supply for evacuation and a two-week supply at home.

- **Food:** Choose nonperishable food that is easy to prepare. Plan for a three-day supply for evacuation and a two-week supply at home, following Red Cross guidance.
- **Light and power:** Flashlight, extra batteries, and a phone charger or backup power source suited to your devices.
- **Health and first aid:** First-aid supplies, prescription and essential over-the-counter medications, and any medical or assistive-device supplies your household uses. The Red Cross checklist recommends keeping a one-month supply of medications where possible.
- **Sanitation and comfort:** Personal-hygiene and sanitation items, a blanket, and a change of clothes.
- **Information and money:** Copies of critical documents, family and emergency contact information, and extra cash.
- **Practical equipment:** A multipurpose tool and a battery-powered or hand-crank radio if appropriate for your local emergency plan.
- **Household-specific items:** Supplies for infants, older adults, people with disabilities, and pets, as applicable.

Tools and alternatives

- **Storage containers:** Use sturdy, sealable bins for home storage. A backpack or other comfortable carry bag can serve as a portable Go-Kit.
- **Inventory method:** Use a paper checklist, a household calendar, or a digital reminder to track contents and expiration dates.
- **Organization:** Group similar supplies in smaller bags or containers. Color coding is optional; keep the system easy for everyone to understand.



Photo via Pexels

Gather and review the supplies before packing so you can spot gaps.

Safety Considerations

Household safety comes first when selecting, storing, and using emergency supplies. Keep medications and potentially hazardous items secured from children, and follow product labels for storage and use. Keep batteries, fuel, and other chemicals away from heat and ignition sources, and store them according to manufacturer instructions. Do not use generators, grills, or camp stoves indoors or in enclosed spaces; follow their safety instructions and local emergency guidance.

Choose food that household members can safely eat, taking allergies, dietary restrictions, and swallowing or preparation needs into account. Store water in clean, food-safe containers. Follow the container's instructions for storage and replacement, and use official local guidance if you are unsure whether tap water is safe after an emergency.

Make sure heavy containers are placed where they can be reached without climbing or lifting beyond your ability. Keep pathways, exits, and essential equipment accessible. If someone in your home relies on powered medical equipment, include a backup-power plan and coordinate with their health-care provider and utility company where relevant.

WARNING:

A kit does not replace evacuation orders, emergency alerts, or professional medical advice. Follow instructions from local authorities, and leave promptly when told to evacuate.



Store supplies where household members can reach them without blocking exits or creating lifting hazards.

Step-by-Step Instructions

Step 1: Identify your household's needs

Visual cue: Start with a household discussion and a written checklist. Ask what each person would need if normal services were disrupted. Consider health conditions, mobility, food restrictions,

language needs, and whether anyone might need to leave quickly. Include pets in the plan.

Decide what you need for staying at home and what should be portable if you evacuate. Ready.gov advises considering a full home kit alongside smaller kits for other places you spend time. Make a list of supplies you already own and those you need to obtain. Start with essentials and build gradually if that makes the project manageable.

Success looks like: Your list reflects the people and animals in your household and separates home supplies from items you may need to carry.

Step 2: Gather and check your supplies

Visual cue: Lay supplies out in groups before packing. Check packaging, expiration dates, battery condition, and whether each item fits your household's needs. Choose foods that can be stored safely and prepared with the equipment you expect to have.

For water and food, use the Red Cross planning targets listed in the materials section. Ready.gov also provides a checklist for building a kit. Compare your supplies with its categories, then note what is missing. If you cannot gather everything at once, begin with items already at home, such as a flashlight, batteries, copies of important documents, water, and nonperishable food.

Success looks like: You have a checked supply list and know which items still need to be added.

Step 3: Pack for access and portability

Visual cue: Place heavy items low in a stable home storage area and pack portable supplies in a bag that household members can carry. Keep related items together, such as first-aid supplies or pet-care items.

Store the home kit in a cool, dry, accessible place that household members know about. Keep it away from hazards and avoid blocking exits. Put portable supplies where you can take them without searching. Store documents in a protective, easy-to-reach place, and keep copies of emergency contacts with the supplies.

Success looks like: Household members can find the kit, reach essentials safely, and identify which bag or supplies are meant to go with them.

Step 4: Personalize and maintain the kit

Visual cue: Add any special-needs supplies, then review your inventory and set a reminder to check it again. Add children's comfort items and age-appropriate necessities. Older adults may need extra vision, hearing, mobility, or medical supplies. For pets, include food, water, medications, a carrier or leash, and identifying information.

Replace expired, damaged, or used supplies. Update clothing and other items as household needs change. Review the kit when seasons change, before severe-weather periods, and after a move or

change in health needs. Keep a smaller kit in other places where you spend time if that suits your household plan.

Success looks like: The kit is easy to locate, suited to everyone at home, and checked often enough to remain usable.

TIP:
Write down the date of each review on your household checklist or calendar. A simple reminder helps prevent supplies from being forgotten.

Troubleshooting Common Problems

Problem	How to identify it	What to do
The kit feels too expensive to complete	Several important items are missing and buying everything at once is difficult.	Build the kit gradually. Start with useful items already at home and add priority supplies over time, as Ready.gov suggests.
Supplies are hard to find	Household members do not know where the kit is, or items are spread across storage areas.	Choose a known, accessible storage location. Group related items and tell household members where the kit is kept.
Food or water is out of date or unsuitable	Packaging is damaged, an item has expired, or someone cannot safely use it.	Replace it with a suitable item and follow storage instructions. Account for allergies, dietary needs, and preparation requirements.
The portable kit is too difficult to carry	The bag is awkward, too heavy for its intended carrier, or packed with items meant only for home use.	Repack it for the person who may carry it. Separate home-only supplies and keep essential portable items easy to reach.
A household member has specialized needs	Medication, assistive-device supplies, comfort items, or pet-care needs are missing.	Ask the person or their care provider what is essential, then add those supplies and review them as needs change.



Regular checks help catch damaged, expired, or unsuitable supplies before they are needed.

Tips for Best Results

- **Make the kit household-specific.** A standard checklist is a starting point, not a substitute for considering each person's needs.
- **Keep instructions accessible.** Include emergency contacts and essential information where household members can find them, while protecting sensitive documents.
- **Plan for both staying and leaving.** A home supply kit and a portable Go-Kit serve different purposes. Keep the portable version manageable for the person expected to carry it.
- **Use a rotation habit.** When replacing everyday items, check whether suitable older supplies can be used first, then replenish the kit with fresh items.

- **Review seasonal risks.** Before local severe-weather seasons, check that lighting, clothing, batteries, and other relevant items remain suitable. Adjust for local hazards and official advice.
- **Include pets in practice.** Make sure you can locate a carrier, leash, or other transport equipment, and keep pet supplies with the plan.
- **Build confidence through a household review.** Ask a family member to locate key supplies. If they cannot find them quickly, improve the storage or organization.

Ready.gov offers a [kit checklist](#) and guidance on [building preparedness over time](#). The Red Cross provides a [detailed emergency supply checklist](#) and information about [survival kit supplies](#).

Conclusion & Next Steps

A useful home emergency kit is organized, accessible, and built around your household-not a generic list. Start by identifying who and what you need to care for. Gather essential emergency supplies, pack them so they are easy to reach, and include the special items children, older adults, and pets may need.

Next, choose a safe storage location and make sure everyone knows where the kit is. Keep a portable set of essentials ready if evacuation is possible. Check food, water, batteries, medications, and personal supplies regularly, replacing anything that has been used, damaged, or is no longer suitable.

You do not need to finish everything in one day. A few thoughtful steps can improve disaster preparedness and household safety, and a simple review habit can keep that preparation useful. Start with your household checklist, gather what you already have, and fill the most important gaps next.



Before: supplies are scattered and difficult to assess. After: home and portable items are grouped for easier access.