



# Are Your Emergency Food Supplies Right for You and Your Family? Things to Consider

## Seniors and Emerging Food Allergies: A Hidden Risk

Decades ago, food allergies and sensitivities were relatively rare. However, their prevalence has **skyrocketed** in the last few decades. Between **1997 and 2011, food allergies among children increased by 50%, and then rose another 50% between 2007 and 2021** (Gupta et al., 2018). Hospital visits for food allergies **tripled** between 1993 and 2006 (Branum & Lukacs, 2008).

Because food allergies were much less common in previous generations, many seniors may **not recognize symptoms of food sensitivities** that affect their well-being. Some may experience discomfort after eating certain foods without linking it to an allergy or intolerance. If an emergency disrupts usual eating patterns, seniors who unknowingly consume allergens or irritants could experience unexpected health challenges.

## Food Safety Challenges in Emergencies

Emergencies can bring unexpected obstacles when it comes to food safety. Here are some risks to consider:

- **Contaminated food:** Illnesses like food poisoning can lead to dehydration and weakness, making it harder to function.
- **Limited medical care:** Hospitals may be overwhelmed or inaccessible, making a preventable food reaction potentially life-threatening.
- **Storage issues:** Long shelf life doesn't guarantee food safety. Heat, moisture, or pests can compromise quality.
- **Hygiene concerns:** Access to clean water and sanitation may be limited, increasing the risk of foodborne illnesses.
- **Vulnerable individuals:** Children, seniors, pregnant individuals, and those with health conditions are especially at risk.

## Essential Tips for Food Safety in Emergencies

Staying prepared means making smart choices. Here's how to ensure your food supply is safe:

- **Inspect packaging:** Avoid dented, bulging, or expired cans.
- **Store food properly:** Keep items in cool, dry places away from pests.
- **Practice cleanliness:** Wash hands (or use sanitizer) before handling food.
- **Cook thoroughly:** If possible, make sure perishables are cooked to the correct temperature.

## Are Your Emergency Foods Safe for You?

When preparing for emergencies, most experts recommend non-perishable items like canned goods, grains, and high-energy snacks. However, many commercial emergency food kits contain allergens, preservatives, and additives that may not be right for everyone.

### Common Emergency Foods

- Canned goods: Vegetables, beans, fruits, soups, meats
- Rice, pasta, and grains
- Nut butters (peanut, almond)
- Dried fruits and nuts
- Shelf-stable milk or powdered milk
- Cereal and granola bars
- Canned fish (tuna, salmon, sardines)
- Flour and baking mixes
- Sugar, salt, and spices

### The "Big 9" Most Common Food Allergies & Sensitivities

While traditional emergency food recommendations seem practical, many contain ingredients that can cause **adverse reactions**. Food allergies and sensitivities—though technically different—can both trigger discomfort or serious health risks.

Most common food allergens include:

1. Milk
2. Eggs
3. Peanuts
4. Tree nuts (almonds, walnuts, cashews)
5. Fish
6. Shellfish
7. Wheat
8. Soy
9. Sesame

Beyond these **true allergies**, many individuals experience **sensitivities** to ingredients like dairy, gluten, MSG, or preservatives. Unlike anaphylactic reactions, food sensitivities may cause **digestive upset, migraines, joint pain, or fatigue**—symptoms that can severely impact well-being during an emergency. **Seniors, in particular, may not recognize that lingering discomfort is linked to food sensitivities.**

### Emergency Food & Allergies: What to Watch For

Your emergency food supply should support your health, not put it at risk. Here's how standard emergency foods compare to the needs of people with allergies:

1. **Ingredients:** Many emergency foods contain allergens, preservatives, or processed ingredients that may trigger reactions.
2. **Availability:** Allergy-friendly emergency food kits exist but are less common.
3. **Preparation:** Some emergency foods require cooking, which could lead to cross-contamination if allergens are present.
4. **Health Impact:** Accidentally consuming allergens in an emergency can lead to severe health consequences, including anaphylaxis.

### **Beyond Allergies—Other Ingredients to Watch**

Even if you're allergy-free, some additives in emergency foods can affect health:

- **MSG:** Found in processed meals; some people experience headaches or nausea.
- **High sodium:** Common in soups and canned goods; excessive sodium can lead to dehydration.
- **Artificial sweeteners:** Such as aspartame, which some prefer to avoid.
- **Trans fats/hydrogenated oils:** Found in processed baked goods; linked to heart disease.
- **Hidden allergens:** Dairy, soy, gluten, and other allergens may be listed under unfamiliar ingredient names.

### **Final Thoughts: Smart Emergency Planning**

Taking the time to build a safe emergency food supply ensures you and your family stay healthy when crisis strikes. Choose allergen-free options, check labels thoroughly, and consider nutritional balance to make sure your emergency food sustains you—not harms you.

By planning ahead, **you can face emergencies with confidence and stay strong through any challenge!**

### **References**

- **Gupta RS, Warren CM, Smith BM, et al.** (2018). "Prevalence and Severity of Food Allergies in the United States." *JAMA Network Open*.
- **Branum AM, Lukacs SL.** (2008). "Food Allergy Among U.S. Children: Trends Over Time." *National Center for Health Statistics*.
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