

## So You Want to Start Prepping

But how do I do that?

Prepping. Now you've realized you should be doing it. You've probably read some articles and looked at some videos on the subject. There's lots of information out there. Are you feeling overwhelmed? Let me help.

It's important to realize that anything you do to prepare yourself and your family for hardship, no matter how small, increases your chance of survival. Choose one thing to do and get it done. It doesn't matter if you own a mansion or you're renting a bedroom in someone's house, prepping is something you not only can do, it's something you *should* do.

Most preppers, by the time they start sharing information on the Internet, are deeply into it. Their videos usually show the likes of fully stocked food stores, amazing water storage and/or filtration systems, completely outfitted tactical bags, specialized bug out vehicles or even secluded bug out destinations. That's great, you'd probably love to have all of that, but what do you buy first? How do you start?

Food and water are the most important items to have. You can have all of the tactical gear in the world, but if you have no way of feeding and hydrating yourself, you likely won't live long enough to need it. I don't advocate completely stocking an extensive food storage system before looking to do other important things, like preparing for defense or putting together a car survival bag. Still, I believe food and water should come first.

The reality is that you can live longer without food than without hydration. Your first purchase should be some extra water. Do you drink bottled water? Buy a few extra jugs or cases and store them. Even if you don't drink store-bought water, you may want to get some anyway. An option is to buy empty jugs and fill them with your normal drinking water if that's what you prefer. Just make sure you put back extra water. Many other things which can be considered vitally important won't be necessary if you die of dehydration. Adding a filtration device comes later in this process.

Do you think you won't need extra water in your situation? You may be right, but I doubt it. What if your well pump breaks down and won't be repaired for days? What if terrorists poison your community's water supply? What if you lose your job, run out of money, and your municipal water gets turned off? What if a water main breaks and you'll be without water for twenty-four hours? What if it's found out that your town's water has been harmful all along, like the situation

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in Flint, Michigan? Do you think your local water sources like rivers, lakes, and ditches are free of pollutants or pathogens that can make you ill? I'll stop here – you get the idea – just store some potable water.

While dehydration will kill you quicker than starvation, you'll need some food, too. In a survival situation, chosen ways of eating, such as the vegan lifestyle, and a whole host of other personal dietary choices, usually get thrown out. (If it's important to you, try to store mostly what you would eat, but keep in mind that surviving whatever has happened is the key to getting back to your chosen way of eating.) I believe the first food items you buy should have calories, protein, and carbohydrates, all necessary to sustain your energy and your life, especially during hard times. Remember that your body will probably be heavily taxed in a survival situation, so expect your food and water to last less time than it would under normal circumstances.

You'll hear over and over that you should only store what you'll eat. I have a slightly different opinion on that. Yes, I store everything we'll eat, but there are a handful of things I store that I hope never to eat. Yes, I said it, as unpopular as it is. I know there are people who love Spam. I'm not one of them, although it's a high protein product that has an amazing shelf life. Yes, I have Spam put back. In a survival situation, I believe I'll be very thankful for powdered milk. I hope to never have to use it either, but you better believe I have some stored. Six months before foods like this expire, I donate them to a food bank and replace it for myself. Then I smile because I've done a good thing for mankind and I've lived long enough without a catastrophe to have these stores expire. It's a good thing.

Where do you put your food and water to store it? That's something you need to work out. I know of people who have a little of their preps in closets throughout their home. Others have converted an extra bedroom, various types of sheds, both attached and unattached to their homes, or even purchased a cargo trailer to outfit. If you're limited by either space or finances, there's still a lot you can do. Stash a few things away. Put a few jugs or cases of water under your bed (an absolute minimum of one gallon, preferably three gallons per day per person.) Stick a couple boxes of salt along with two or three weeks' worth of protein that doesn't require refrigeration (tuna cans or foil packs, canned beef or chicken, Spam, sardines, etc.) on a shelf in

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your closet. Then hide a dozen or more one pound packs of various types of dried beans in your sock drawer and at least five, preferably ten pounds of rice in a different one. That's all it takes to help you survive long enough to be able to find other sources of food and water. These are extremely cheap, other than the protein, and you've now outfitted yourself to eat and drink for two weeks or more. You may want to double or triple this in various bedrooms, etc., depending on the size of your family and your prepping ambition. (Also, remember to provide for infants.)

From this point on, whenever you go to the grocery store to buy food your family eats, buy a little extra. A couple of cans here and a couple of cans there add up. Purchase extras of all of the non-perishable foods you routinely use. Remember you're trying to get ahead on them, so don't put them in your pantry where they'll get absentmindedly used; put them away. When you do need them, use them, but restock them, plus a little more. Stock your pantry from your stores, and then replenish your stores.

In time, dependent on your finances, space, and effort, you'll find that you've cluttered the spot where you're storing your food. By this time, you're well into it and motivated. I hated to do it, but when I couldn't walk in that area anymore (not to mention I had completely lost track of what I had and what I needed) I had to breakdown and buy a shelving unit. One word of caution: as your supplies grow, so will their cumulative weight. When you finally spend your money on shelves instead of more stores, buy with this excessive weight in mind. Purchase heavy duty steel shelving units and don't bother with wheels of any sort; they'll be useless under such weight. You can get these for around \$150 at national "big box" stores. Two of these units can contain enough food for two people to last a year, assuming you're good at organizing and packing.

With your first storage shelf in place, please consider safety, especially if children are ever around it. You want to anchor the unit in place and put heavy items low and to the back for stability. I personally believe that salt would be one of the most valuable commodities in a long-term grid-down situation and I used multiple twenty-five-pound bags of salt on the backside of the bottom shelf to further hold the unit in place.

Now that you know what your first purchases should be, you need to be familiar with "first in, first out." Rotate your food stores. Use the oldest ones first each and every time. Put the date on everything perishable and develop a system of rotation for yourself.

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Through both research and trial and error, you'll come up with a storage system that works for you. My preferred method of storing dried beans is to put them up in one pound packages, which allows for more variety in your diet when using them. (I love red beans, but I don't want to eat them every single day.) Line a five-gallon bucket with a resealable Mylar bag and tightly fill it with the packages of beans and an oxygen absorbing pack. Press the air out of the bag, seal it, and then put the lid on your bucket. Now, in long-term storage, you have enough beans to feed your family for months. You can extend the life of freeze-dried meals by storing them in the same manner. Big box stores, such as Costco and Sam's Club are convenient, if you have access to them, because the boxed cases of canned goods sold there store well on shelves. I also have clear, stackable, plastic bins with lids for other things, such as toiletries, things that make fire or things that burn, batteries, a first aid kit that never leaves home, etc. Every container is labeled unless I can see right through it, and as mentioned before, everything perishable is dated.

Another fundamental of prepping is protecting your stores. The most commonly used and passive way to do this is to prep in secrecy. If no one knows you have extra food, those who didn't prepare in advance, otherwise known as the desperate masses, won't know to look to you for it. I did this for years before I spoke of it to anyone outside of my family. It's a common practice. It's surprising how many people come up to me at a book signing and panel discussions and whisper, "I'm a prepper, too." We're not alone.

If you do speak out like I do, be prepared to defend your stores. What you've put back could very well be the difference between life and death, and future of your family. My preps are stored in a place that has a code name. My prepper minded family and I all use the name freely, even in public, because no one knows what we're talking about. I like it that way. While speaking of my stores in the community, when people know what I'm talking about, I refuse to give the location and code name out. Even though I speak of it often, by avoiding specific information, I'm already passively defending it. That said, my husband John and I, along with our family, are fully prepared to defend it in any way necessary. It's a survival mindset and it's a good one to have.

I have confidence in you. If you're smart enough to be aware you need to prep, you're smart enough to figure this out. My hat is off to those who make it happen. We are the survivors.