



Are You Sabotaging Your Preparedness Efforts?

The pandemic has changed so many things for all of us no matter where in the world we live. It seems I receive notes and appeals every few days with the same concern: how do you prepare? I have heard, “I just have this feeling I need to prepare” more times than I can count.

In the past we have discussed how you may be sabotaging your food storage but there is much more to self-reliance than food storage. We should be preparing for inflation by building our food and non-food supplies, however, to be truly prepared we must consider how we will deal with all emergencies as they arrive, and they will.

You could be sabotaging your efforts if:

1. You move too fast. Many went right ahead and jumped into emergency preparedness—they blew a thousand bucks on off-the-shelf solutions before they’d educated themselves... Slow down. Take the time to understand your needs. What are you planning for?

The knowledge we need to deal with such emergencies comes through awareness, study, and organization. Analyze what your family needs before you begin purchasing. Create a list, then plan and budget your priorities before buying anything.

2. You fail to focus on food first. No matter the disaster, when thinking about inflation, a natural disaster, job loss, civil unrest, an expensive medical emergency, fire, etc., you will need to feed your family. Food not only feeds our bodies, but it brings comfort during difficult times.

After months of staying home during the pandemic you are probably more aware than ever of your own family’s needs. What was your family craving, what was missing in the store, what are your family’s favorite meals, what are your family’s favorite desserts, what foods are traditional for birthdays and holidays?

3. You ignore non-food items such as: medications, hygiene supplies, cleaning supplies, paper products, and (of course) toilet paper. We should have learned during 2020 just how quickly non-food essentials disappear from store shelves and how many of those essential items are imported from foreign countries leaving us dangerously dependent.

4. You follow someone else’s plan. There are many emergency plans floating around on the Internet. Be careful. Do not follow another’s plan, especially when planning your food storage. Create a plan so you know what you are planning for and then prepare for those scenarios. If you live in the country your preps will be very different than those living in the city. If you live in 3,000 square foot home your preps will be different than those living in a New York City apartment.

5. You ignore a sensible storage strategy. Where are you going to safely store the items you are purchasing and still have access when the need arises?

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All foods, even grains in cans and dehydrated foods, should be stored in a cool, dark, and dry area of your home. Temperatures should remain under 80 degrees on the worst days, and below 70 degrees for optimal storage.

Items essential for thriving following an earthquake or during a power outage need to be ready to grab and use with all the essentials ready. A Hibachi may be a great choice for cooking during a power outage in a townhouse, but do you also have charcoal? Do you know where it is, and can you easily get to it?

Create new names for some areas of your home to break the mindset that you have become used to. The coat closet can be renamed the “grain pantry.” The linen cupboard can be thought of as the “toiletries and medications cupboard.” There is no law that declares a home must have a coat closet by the front door. Though it is nice to have one, it is also nice to protect your preparedness investment. In a few minutes you can add shelves to make storage spaces much more valuable areas of your home. It may take a few more minutes to grab a coat from your bedroom closet, but it might be worth the effort. If you need storage ideas, we posted some on the Totally Ready Facebook page last September.

6. You put too much focus on bugging out. In most cases you will be safer staying home during an emergency. If you are in the path of a hurricane and advised to get out, leave, and leave early. Yes, prepare kits to grab and have an evacuation plan in place if you need to go but don't spend your money preparing for bugging out for months when in all likelihood you will hunker down at home.

7. You overlook comfort items. Yes—chocolate, candy, and popcorn all have their place in a good, well-constructed food storage plan. Did you know popcorn is also the corn you will want on hand to grind for corn meal? Real popcorn, not the microwave variety. Do you have games, books, crossword puzzles, yard games, fire pits, activities that don't require electricity? All these bring comfort and calm during a crisis. Hopefully, we have all learned too much screen time is not good and we all need personal interaction with loved ones during a time of upheaval.

8. You ignore skill development. Cooking off grid, preserving and growing food, fire prevention, defense, building a fire, sewing, auto repair, first aid, herbal medications, laundry without a washer and dryer, water purification, candle making, soap making... there are so many skills that will be of value during an emergency. During the pandemic how often were we asked to wash our hands with soap? As you plan your summer think about the skills you can hone, learn, and teach yourself and your family. Even if you live in an apartment or in the desert and water and space are limited you can grow something in a pot or two. You can harvest a lot of cherry tomatoes or zucchini from one plant.

9. You fail to have the proper equipment. If you don't have a wheat grinder, what good is wheat? You could use it as a cereal, but that won't help make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich—so why are you storing peanut butter and jelly? Can you cook stored foods off the grid if you should be without power? Do you have at least some foods that can be eaten right from the can? Which begs the question, do you have a manual can opener?

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10. You buy equipment you cannot afford, may never use, and have no room to store. Learn to make equipment from things you already own and have around the house. For example, you can heat rooms during a power outage using a paint can, TP and rubbing alcohol. Don't purchase expensive propane heater and then be left with an inadequate food supply.

Buying off-the-shelf kits is not worth the cost in most cases. Kits often come with items that are of poor quality and/or unnecessary. As an example, one 3-day kit has a 3,600-calorie bar. Only 1200 calories a day is not enough when your body is stressed. How do you tell a child, or adult, who is still hungry they can only have a third of the bar in an entire day? Another kit meant for two has only one flashlight. Tube tents in a kit, are a complete waste. Tube tents will not hold up and will never retain heat during winter months. Another kit has a water container but not a purifier for the water. Make your own kits.

11. You purchase your supplies and gear, throw it in a closet, pat yourself on the back, and move on. You are not prepared unless you practice with your supplies and know how to use and prepare meals with them.

The same principle applies to your food. Consider the importance of rotating your food and other supplies on a regular basis. This is by far the biggest mistake most people make. They run out and purchase food storage and it is not what they are accustomed to eating. Therefore, they do not cook with it and they do not rotate it. After a few years, it is thrown away. You must rotate your food storage, medical supplies and even cleaning supplies. All have a shelf life. What good is all this hard work and money invested if it all ends up in the dumpster?

12. You don't save up. it's better to buy fewer high-quality things than cheap tools that will fail when you need them most. You can prep without much money if you plan for large purchases while learning to create solutions with items you already have on hand.

13. You underestimate the value of water. Water is often the overlooked or under-planned element in a preparedness plan. When designing your plan be aware that dehydrated and freeze-dried foods need extra water to reconstitute and prepare. They may need two to three times as much water as product. One cup of vegetables or meat may require two to three cups of water to reconstitute.

You need water for drinking, flushing, cleaning, laundry, and watering the garden in addition to drinking and cooking. Don't forget pets are family members too and need to be counted when calculating how much water to store.

There is no such thing as bad water. Water that may have developed mold is still good for watering the garden. Water with bugs floating in it can still be strained and used for flushing and laundry.

14. You overlook canned foods. Canned fruits and veggies are also a source of liquids for drinking or cooking. You already know how to use canned varieties and the kids are used to their taste and texture. This is precisely the reason for storing them instead of dehydrated and freeze-dried varieties.

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15. You lose track of what you have. First take time to make a list of items and foods you need to accumulate. Design a spread sheet or get out the good old paper and pencil and record what you have so you know what you still need. Now begin working at creating, purchasing, bartering or in other ways obtaining them. Why not ask for some of them for Christmas or birthdays?

Next create an inventory system so you can keep track of what you are storing and what you need to replace as they are used, worn out, or lost. Keep a list on your phone, on a spread sheet, or with Alexa as you need replacements.

16. You borrow and forget to return it. For example, it is tempting to borrow out of your bug out bag for a camping trip, power outage or heat wave. But then life tends to get in the way. The gear stays scattered, and when an emergency surprises you, you find yourself unprepared. Create a list to be kept posted in a conspicuous place or on your device and label it, "Need to replace in my kit".

17. You store it all in one place. If you have a natural disaster strike your home, some rooms may be destroyed while others are untouched. If you have spread out your storage you may be able to salvage at least part of your supplies.

Thinking a little more negatively, should someone enter your home to steal, they may find some of your stash, be satisfied and leave. Or, if you take a person in need to one area of your storage with the intent of sharing, they can take what they need while the rest will remain safely unnoticed—just in case they discuss your generosity with others who are not so trustworthy.

Where can you store? How about in your camper, boat, car, at work, a shed, root cellar, attic, crawl space, closets? Try unexpected places like a bathroom, decorative trunks, or baskets.

18. You think of weapons and "off grid" but don't know how to use the equipment and weapons. Don't count on hunting and fishing if you have no idea how to shoot the gun, dress out a deer or smoke a fish. Focus on what you know and expand only after you have gained some expertise.

19. You fail to involve your family. Your family will need skills and the mindset for survival if there is to be peace in your home during a crisis. On the Totally Ready blog we have been working to build a culture of self-reliance in our homes. This is becoming more and more necessary as times become more challenging. We are on our own to teach life skills and lessons learned by our parents and grandparents who lived through depressions, inflationary periods, and wars. Our schools no longer teach these skills that are needed more and more.

20. You don't find a support group. Prepping is better when you connect with like-minded people and share knowledge, ideas, and resources. Burnout is a real thing when focusing on a goal and preparing is no exception. If you begin to feel frustrated, overwhelmed, or like you are failing, a group of people who can inspire you is essential.

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21. You have a false sense of security. You have the belief the government or church or relief organization will take care of your needs. This has become an even bigger problem since the pandemic began because the government did attempt to save many. However, if you speak with survivors of fires or hurricanes or volcanoes, as I have, you will understand we can expect little help from government agencies and relief organizations in those circumstances. The process to obtain help is complicated and long, and the financial help minimal.

22. You don't find the experts. It is so easy to follow someone on Facebook or a website but do they really "know their stuff"? Have they researched? Do they have a proven track record? How many survivors have they interviewed? How many disasters have they visited?

Years ago, there were several who were promoting to ignore experts and use the Triangle of Life instead. This was the advice to huddle behind a sofa or stack of magazines during an earthquake. They encouraged readers to follow this council instead of the drop, cover and hang on counsel. With just a little research numerous studies could be found documenting the fact that survivors of earthquakes were most often found under tables and desks, not next to stacks of papers or behind a sofa. Unfortunately, many were led astray by those claiming to be experts.

A few years ago, I heard an "expert" on TV encouraging water storage in used milk containers—awful advice as they will leak in a very short amount of time. I recently read an article by a popular blogger who posted an article on upcoming inflation that was two years old.

23. You overlook your physical health. Maintaining good health and the ability to work and help out during a crisis prevents injuries and ensures the family's needs for help can be met.

24. You overlook your spiritual health. Self-reliance brings peace that enables you to more easily feel the guidance of the spirit. If, however, you are not also spiritually prepared you may not be accustomed to hearing those promptings and able to provide that guidance to your family. Prepare now by recognizing and helping your family recognize the blessings you receive each day. Study the scriptures and discuss the lessons learned.

25. You don't have a preparedness binder. The most common challenge requiring preparation and skill is a power outage. They occur after almost every weather disaster. Many power companies are now turning off power during high winds to prevent fires. Imagine the power is out and it is 104 degrees outside. You need help knowing how to survive, with no internet search, and no help. Once the power is out it's too late to get help evacuating. A binder is a must have for anyone serious about caring for their family during a stressful time.

Once aware of these common stumbling blocks, we can keep our family preparedness plan on track, in balance, and ready for whatever comes your way.