



Think of food, water before hurricane hits

Hurricane season is here again, making it time for a refresher course on hurricane food and survival. Limiting the impact of nature's fury is all about timing.

Even in a minor storm, power failures can occur. This increases health risks from contaminated or spoiled foods. Preparing for a hurricane includes purchasing foods that can be stored and prepared without electricity, and making sure that food and water are kept safe.

Question: What are the first steps?

Answer: Now is the time to gather the equipment you'll need to cook for yourself. This includes a can opener, matches, camp stove or other emergency cooking equipment and fuel. Other necessary items are bleach, a flashlight, radio and extra batteries.

Using a refrigerator thermometer to ensure that food temperatures do not rise above 40 degrees can prevent the occurrence of stomach storms. Above 40 degrees, bacteria

multiply rapidly and can cause food-borne illnesses.

Q: When should I actively prepare for a storm?

A: The answer is now. Throughout the season, check weather forecasts or the National Hurricane Center site at www.nhc.noaa.gov. When a tropical storm or hurricane is within four days of the islands, it is time for a serious shopping trip, unless you already have a three- to four-day supply of nonperishable foods and water on hand. Iniki showed us that storms do not always stay on a predictable path.

Buy foods that do not need refrigeration and that can be consumed at one time, with little or no preparation. Look for nonperishables that you are willing to eat directly out of the can or package. They should not require added water.

Keep extra plastic containers and bags to hold dry goods such as crackers, bread sticks, tea and coffee.

Q: How much water is needed?

A: Living in a tropical area, it is best to plan on a gallon of water a day per person for three to four days. Nursing mothers, children and those who are ill may require more. Canned or bottled beverages, including juices and sodas, are water substitutes.

Q: What is the best way to keep refrigerated foods cold?

A: When a Hurricane Watch has been announced by the National Weather Service, turn the refrigerator and freezer to the coldest setting. Fill all empty freezer space with bottles three-quarters filled with water and loosely capped. They will help keep the freezer cold, and the thawed water can be used for drinking.

Don't forget to have a clean cooler and an ice pack ready to use if necessary so that the refrigerator and/or freezer do not need to be opened frequently.

Next week, we'll discuss how to be sure that food and water remain safe after a storm hits.

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