Preparing Foods During a Power Failure

During a power failure, cooking and eating habits must change to fit the situation. You may have no heat, no refrigeration, and limited safe drinking water. In addition, health risks from contaminated or spoiled food may increase. When preparing food during a power outage:

**Conserve fuel**

1. Consider the amount of cooking time needed for particular foods. If you have limited heat for cooking, choose foods which cook quickly. Prepare casseroles and one-dish meals, or serve no-cook foods.
2. Alternative cooking methods include:
   1. *Fireplace*. Many foods can be skewered, grilled, or wrapped in foil and cooked in the fireplace.
   2. *Electric utensils.* If gas is cut off, but you still have electricity, use electric skillets, hot plates, or coffee makers to heat food.
   3. *Candle warmers*. Devices using candle warmers such as *fondue pots* may be used if no other heat sources are available.
   4. *Camp stoves and charcoal heaters*. These must be used outside your home. Never use fuel-burning camp stoves or charcoal burners inside your home, even in a fireplace. Fumes from these stoves can be deadly.
   5. Barbeque grills that are fueled by propane, charcoal, or wood pellets. These devices make great backup means of cooking, but again should never be used without adequate ventilation, and never inside the home!
3. Do not cook frozen foods unless you have ample heat for cooking. Some frozen foods require considerably more cooking time and heat then canned goods. Also, if power is off, it is best to leave the freezer door closed to keep food from thawing.
4. Commercial canned foods can be eaten straight from the can. *Do not use home canned vegetables unless you have the means to heat them for ten minutes before eating.*

**Conserve water**

1. Save liquids from canned vegetables. Substitute these for water in cooked dishes.
2. Drain and save juices from canned fruits. Substitute these for water in salads and beverages.

**Observe health precautions**

1. If at all uncertain about the safety of the water, boil all water used in food preparation for at least 10 minutes.
2. If you are without refrigeration, open only enough food containers for one meal. Some foods can be kept a short time without refrigeration. Well done vegetables and meat can be kept unrefrigerated from noon until the evening meal if covered. Do not keep these dishes overnight without refrigeration. If available, packaged survival or camping foods are safe. Do not serve foods that spoil easily, such as ground meats, creamed foods, hash, custards, and meat pies. These are potential sources of food poisoning.
3. If necessary, substitute canned and powdered milk for fresh milk. Canned milk will keep safely for many hours after you open the can. If you are using canned milk to feed a baby, however, open a fresh can for each bottle. Use only boiled or disinfected water to mix powdered milk. Use reconstituted milk immediately after it is mixed if you have no refrigeration. If safe water or water disinfectants are not available use canned or bottled fruit juices instead of water.
4. Prepare and eat foods in their original containers if possible. This will help if dishwashing facilities are limited. Be careful with the sharp lids after opening cans to avoid cuts.

**Stockpile the basics**

Most homes do not have an adequate stockpile of foods that can carry them through a power outage. It is recommended that every home have in reserve enough basic foods, that don’t require heating or refrigeration, to feed everyone living there for at least three days. If members of the household have special diet needs, this should be taken into consideration. Remember no governmental or non-governmental agency has the capacity to provide everyone with food during a power outage, or when travel is not possible.