

EATING ON THE RUN



BY CARYN HONIG, RD, LD

Food Safety During A Hurricane

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita have affected the entire nation. In Texas, we have experienced the aftermaths as thousands of evacuees pour into our state. Many Houston area runners volunteered at the Astrodome, George R. Brown Convention Center and Reliant Center. HARRA and *Inside Texas Running* collected clothing to be donated to the evacuees.

As I sat down to write this month's nutrition article, I had to find a way to write about the hurricanes and how runners can be prepared for future hurricanes and other natural disasters. As prepared as runners are for races, are we as prepared for life catastrophes such as these hurricanes? I would venture to guess not. I would guess that your pantry is full of PowerBars, gels, and Gatorade and your refrigerator is stocked with fresh fruits, lean meat, and vegetables. Great for sports nutrition, but even runners need to be prepared for a hurricane and other natural disasters.

Advance preparation is a key to food safety during a hurricane and the floods that can accompany it. Those living in hurricane areas (*i.e.* Texas) should keep adequate supplies on hand because power will likely be disrupted, putting food in danger. Some emergency food supplies that should always be kept on hand include: hand can opener, camp stove or other emergency cooking equipment, flashlights, candles, matches, kerosene lamp, kitchen utensils.

JUST AS WE NEED TO BE WELL TRAINED AND PREPARED FOR RACES, WE NEED TO BE PREPARED FOR LIFE SITUATIONS. HOPEFULLY FROM NOW ON WE WILL BE READY IF/WHEN OTHER HURRICANES AND NATURAL DISASTERS HIT.

HURRICANE "WATCH"

The following are necessary during a hurricane watch:

- Purchase commercially bottled water if possible and store in a cool, dry, dark place. Each person will need a gallon of drinking water daily for three to four days. Children, nursing mothers, people who are ill and those living in hot environments may require extra water. Remember to include drinking and clean-up water for your pets.

- Store an additional ½ gallon per person per day for food preparation and hygiene needs.
- Keep an appliance thermometer in the refrigerator and freezer at all times to see if food is being stored at safe temperatures (40 °F or lower for the refrigerator; 0 °F for the freezer). Turn your refrigerator and freezer to the coldest setting.

- Keep your freezer as full as possible by freezing water in plastic containers (leave some space in the containers for expansion) and using them to fill any empty spaces not occupied by frozen food. Put the containers around the food in your freezer. Not only will this help food to remain cool, it will also provide you with cool, safe drinking water for the first few hours after the storm.

Group meat and poultry on the bottom shelf of the freezer or on separate trays so their juices will not contaminate each other or other foods if the meat and poultry thaw.

- Keep a clean cooler on hand. Keep freeze-pak inserts frozen for use in the cooler.

FOODS TO KEEP ON HAND IN YOUR PANTRY

Store at least a three-day supply of nonperishable food. Select items that do not require refrigeration, preparation or cooking, and little or no water. Suggestions include:

- Ready-to-eat cereals
 - Crackers and bread
 - Dried fruits
 - Canned meats, fruits and vegetables
 - Canned juices and soup (if powdered, store extra water)
 - Milk. The three forms of milk with a long shelf life are:
 1. Canned milk.
 2. Ultra heat-treated milk in small cartons found in the store by the canned milk.
 3. Powdered milk (Remember to mix with purified water.)
 - Staples – sugar, salt, pepper, etc.
 - High energy foods – peanut butter, jelly, crackers, granola bars, trail mix.
 - Vitamins.
 - Foods for infants, elderly or persons on special diets. (Do not use leftover baby food if not refrigerated.)
 - Comfort/stress foods – cookies, hard candy, sweetened cereals, instant coffee, tea bags, etc.
 - Extra pet food.
 - Processed cheese foods that do not need refrigeration.
- Keep in mind that canned goods have at least a one-year shelf life; others may be safe for

three to five years. Many items such as the ultra-heat-treated milk will have expiration dates that should be your guide. If there are no expiration dates on the cans, check their condition. Throw out leaky, rusty, bulging and badly dented cans.

WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW FOOD OUT!

The following is what the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) suggest to keep food safe:

- Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature. The refrigerator will keep food cold for about four hours if it is unopened. A full freezer will keep the temperature for approximately 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full) if the door remains closed. Buy dry or block ice to keep the refrigerator as cold as possible if the power is going to be out for a prolonged period of time. Fifty pounds of dry ice should hold an 18-cubic foot fully stocked freezer cold for two days.

- If you plan to eat refrigerated or frozen meat, poultry, fish or eggs while they are still at safe temperatures, it's important that the food is thoroughly cooked to the proper temperature to assure that any food borne bacteria that may be present is destroyed.

- Before eating fresh fruits and vegetable, wash them with clean and safe water.

- For infants, if possible, use prepared, canned baby formula that requires no added water. When using concentrated or powdered formulas, prepare with bottled water if the local water source is potentially contaminated.

ONCE THE POWER IS RESTORED

- Once the power is restored you will need to evaluate the safety of the food. If an appliance thermometer was kept in the freezer, read the temperature when the power comes back on. If the thermometer stored in the freezer reads 40 degrees F or below, the food is safe and may be refrozen. If a thermometer has not been kept in the freezer, check each package of food to determine the safety. Remember, you can't rely on appearance or odor. If the food still contains ice crystals or is 40 degrees F or below, it is safe to refreeze or cook.

- Refrigerated food should be safe as long as the power is out for no more than four hours. Keep the door closed as much as possible. Discard any perishable food (such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs or leftovers) that has been above 40 degrees F for two hours or more.

For a list of how to handle specific refrigerated and frozen foods during power outages, go to http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/keeping_food_Safe_during_an_emergency/index.asp.

FOOD AND WATER SAFETY DURING HURRICANES AND FLOODS

- Hurricanes, especially if accompanied by a tidal surge or flooding, can contaminate the public water supply. Drinking contaminated water may cause illness. You cannot assume that the water in the hurricane-affected area is safe to drink. Listen to local announcements for updated information on the safety of the water supply.

- If bottled water is not available and the safety of tap water is questionable, follow these directions to purify it:

1. If you have a heat source available, boil the water vigorously for one-three minutes (at altitudes above one mile, boil for three minutes). Water should be bubbling and rolling.

2. If you can't boil water, add 8 drops (about 1/8 teaspoon or 0.75 ml) of newly purchased, unscented liquid household bleach per gallon of water, stir it well and let the water stand for 30 minutes before you use it. Note that using bleach will not kill parasitic organisms.

3. You can also use water-purifying tablets from your local pharmacy or sporting goods store.

- Do not eat any food that may have come into contact with flood water. Discard any food without a waterproof container if there is any chance that it has come into contact with floodwater. Undamaged, commercially canned foods can be saved if you remove the labels, thoroughly wash the cans and disinfect them with a solution consisting of 1/4 cup of bleach per gallon of water for clean surfaces. Re-label your cans, including the expiration date, with a marker. Food containers with screw-caps, snap lids, and home canned foods should be discarded if they have come in contact with flood water because they cannot be disinfected.

- Discard wooden cutting boards, plastic utensils, baby bottle nipples and pacifiers. There is no way to safely clean them if they have come in contact with contaminated floodwaters. Thoroughly wash metal pans, ceramic dishes and utensils with soap and hot water. They should then be sanitized by boiling in clean water or immersing them for 15 minutes in a solution of 1/4 cup of chlorine bleach per gallon of water.

For more information on safe food handling, go to www.foodsafety.gov or call FDA's toll-free information line at 1-888-SAFEFOOD (1-888-723-3366).

Just as we need to be well trained and prepared for races, we need to be prepared for life situations. Hopefully from now on we will be ready if/when other hurricanes and natural disasters hit.

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