



## National Family Caregiver Support Program

### Just In Case



### Emergency Readiness for Older Adults and Caregivers

#### **QUICK SUMMARY:**

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita reminded us that personal emergency readiness needs to be a priority for everyone, including older adults and caregivers. This supplement to *Aging in Stride - Plan Ahead, Stay Connected, Keep Moving* recommends a simple, three-step approach:

**Step 1 - Know the basics.** Learn about the risks your particular community faces; know how to do things like turning off your gas and electricity; get to know your neighbors.

**Step 2 - Have your emergency supplies ready.** This includes items you would need to survive in your home until help arrives; it should also include a personal evacuation bag, partially packed and ready to go.

**Step 3 - Make a personal plan.** Many older persons have special needs relating to medications, medical equipment, mobility, and support services; making a personal emergency readiness plan increases the likelihood that essential needs will still be met, even in an emergency situation.

This *Aging in Stride* supplement also includes a companion form, *Emergency Readiness Checklist for Older Adults*.

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# Just In Case

## Emergency Readiness for Older Adults and Caregivers

**F**or older adults and caregivers – as for all Americans – Hurricanes Katrina and Rita were a stark reminder of how quickly and completely a sudden, unexpected emergency can disrupt normal living. We can't prevent emergencies, but there are things we can do to be prepared, just in case.

### SOME PERSPECTIVE

Planning for an emergency that might never happen – and that we certainly hope will never happen – may not seem like a priority. But it should be.

No matter where you live, you and your home are part of a larger community. It might be the neighborhood where you've lived for decades. Or maybe you've recently moved to a retirement community. Either way, your community is already working on emergency planning – that's the good news. But it's also counting on individuals like you to take responsibility for being prepared at a personal level.

Chances are your personal emergency planning will never be put to a test like Katrina. But keep in mind that emergencies – and the disruptions they cause – can come in many levels of intensity. You may never need your flashlight, portable radio and extra batteries because of a powerful earthquake; but, you'll be glad you have them the next time a windstorm knocks out power to your area.

### GETTING STARTED

Somewhere in your home you probably already have an emergency readiness checklist – one you've clipped out of the paper, or a family member gave you, or you downloaded off the Internet. A checklist can help you get started and know you've taken the steps you should be taking. The form we include as a supplement to *Aging in Stride* is attached and is also available as a free download at [www.AgingInStride.org](http://www.AgingInStride.org).

As our *Checklist* suggests, emergency preparedness for yourself or your loved one doesn't have to be complicated. Think of it as a simple, three-step process.

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## STEP 1: KNOW THE BASICS

As we've all learned from years of experience, the first ingredient in preparing for almost anything is a little practical information.

Start by learning what kinds of risks your community faces. Do you live on the Atlantic or Gulf Coast where hurricanes are a concern? Are you in an earthquake zone? What about tornadoes? Do you live near a nuclear power plant or chemical storage complex? Knowing what risks you face will help you prepare. If disasters that strike with little or no warning (such as earthquake, tsunami, or tornado) are a risk for your community, you'll want to know exactly what to do as your first response.

These days, information on emergency planning for your community should be easy to find. Search on the Web; stop by the library or city hall; or ask at your area's emergency management agency or fire department.

Our *Checklist* suggests you test your readiness by asking – and being able to answer – these questions:

- If there were an evacuation order, what is the recommended route from where you live? If you don't drive, what are your transportation options? Where is the nearest emergency shelter?
- Where are the shut-off valves for your household utilities (gas, electricity, water)? Do you know how to use them? If they take a special tool, is it kept right there, ready to use?
- In an emergency, local phone service may be down for an extended period. Have you designated someone out-of-area as your emergency contact? Do your loved ones know who your emergency contact will be?
- Neighbors helping neighbors can be critical in an emergency. Do you know your neighbors? Do they know you and any special needs you may have?

## STEP 2: HAVE YOUR EMERGENCY SUPPLIES READY

Being ready for an emergency means having the supplies you would need. There are two aspects to this:

*First, your "stay at home" supplies.* These are the things you would need to survive safely in your home until help can arrive. In a major disaster, this can mean several days or perhaps even a week or more. For planning purposes, you need to assume you would be without power and would not be able to go out for food or water. Your household emergency supplies should include:

- enough water to last 3 to 6 days (recommended quantity: one gallon per person per day.)

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- food – also enough for 3 to 6 days – consisting of high energy items that won't spoil and don't require cooking
  - flashlight
  - portable radio
  - spare batteries
  - first aid kit
  - hand-operated can opener
  - some light sticks (Along with your flashlight and spare batteries, these are a safe, inexpensive alternative to candles. **Remember, any open flame in a post-disaster situation requires extreme caution, since the fire department will have its plate full and may not be able to respond quickly, or at all.**)
  - waterproof matches
  - a 3 to 6 day supply of your prescription medications, together with an up-to-date list of the medications you're taking
  - cell phone, if you have one
  - some cash or travelers' checks
  - your emergency contact list, including the names, phone numbers, and email addresses you would want to have and be able to give aid workers in an emergency.

*Second, your "evacuation bag."* These are the things you would need to have for a safe evacuation, if that became necessary. Your evacuation bag should be a backpack or travel bag, preferably one that rolls, that has room for many of the items listed above and that is pre-packed with the following items:

- basic personal hygiene items, such as toilet paper, alcohol wipes, and gel hand sanitizer
- extra pair of prescription glasses
- change of clothing
- compact rain slicker
- good pair of walking shoes
- blanket or sleeping bag
- bottle or two of water, some breakfast bars, and some hard candy
- some disposable dust masks
- a copy of both your emergency contacts list and your current medications list.

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Remember, the goal here is to give yourself a margin of preparedness to see you through until help can arrive, or to get you safely through an evacuation. So, think about what other items you might need, given your situation.

For example, if you have a car and would expect to use it if you had to evacuate, you'll want to keep the gas tank at least half or even three-quarters full. This will be a bit inconvenient, because you'll need to fill your tank twice as often; but that clearly beats worrying about running out of fuel in a real emergency!

And if you own a pet, you'll want to add an extra supply of pet food to your list. Again, this just means getting in the habit of buying it at least a week or two before you run out. Keep in mind, by the way, that most emergency shelters do not allow pets, unless they are service animals, such as a seeing eye dog.

### **STEP 3: MAKE A PERSONAL PLAN**

You've gathered the information you need. You've pulled together the emergency supplies you should have on hand. You're ready, right?

Not quite. The third step – and for many, the most important – is to make a personal emergency response plan. What special needs do you have? And how will they be met in an emergency?

No one knows your situation better than you. So, you are in the best position to plan ahead. If you have limited mobility or are disabled, you may be able to register with your local fire department or office of emergency services for special assistance. If you use an electric wheelchair or scooter, consider keeping your old, unpowered model around for emergency use.

If you are receiving health care services at home, ask your home health provider about emergency procedures. For example, if you depend on electric power for home dialysis or infusion, you'll want to know your options for temporary emergency power or, in the case of home infusion, you may want to discuss having a back-up drip system.

If you live in a retirement community, assisted living facility, or adult family home, learn about emergency planning and procedures. How will you be kept informed? What will the facility or community expect of you and your fellow residents?

This is personal planning. But that doesn't mean doing it all on your own. If you can, work through the checklist with a family member or friend. Chances are they'll jump at the opportunity; and it will be a good reminder for them to be ready, as well.

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## **A WORD ABOUT THE RISK OF PANDEMIC FLU**

Seasonal influenza – or flu – kills about 35,000 Americans each year, with older adults being at especially high risk. You’ve probably read about bird (or avian) flu. Health officials are watching it closely. They’re worried bird flu might trigger a worldwide pandemic, like the deadly Spanish Influenza pandemic of 1918.

Because influenza – whether pandemic or seasonal – poses a serious health risk to older people, there are some simple precautions we should all be taking:

*First*, get your annual flu shot as protection against seasonal flu. And check with your doctor about vaccination for bacterial pneumonia. The actual cause of death for many who die in a flu outbreak is pneumonia. The CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) recommends pneumonia vaccination for all adults 65 and older.

*Second*, keep your body’s natural immunity as strong as possible. Eat right. Drink plenty of water. Get your rest. Make physical exercise a regular part of your day.

*Third*, take the smart, usual precautions against spreading any infection. Keep your hands clean by washing them with warm water and soap – remember, the recommended time to really get them clean is 10 to 20 seconds. If washing is inconvenient, use an alcohol hand sanitizer or wipe. Cover your coughs and sneezes. And, don’t touch your eyes, mouth, or nose, unless you’ve cleaned your hands first.

## **WORTH THE EFFORT**

No doubt about it, completing your emergency readiness checklist will take some time and attention. But look around you – we’re talking about your home, your safety, and your peace of mind in knowing you’re prepared.

And once you’ve finished your own checklist, you become a valuable resource to friends and neighbors, helping them get prepared.

Invest the time today, and then get on with your life. It’s the smart thing to do, just in case.

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION



The Red Cross website offers information on disaster preparedness, including “Preparing for Disaster for People with Disabilities and Other Special Needs.” Go to [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) for news, safety tips and updates.



The FEMA website includes a 204-page booklet to help you prepare for specific emergencies ([www.fema.gov/areyouready](http://www.fema.gov/areyouready)). The site also offers information on assisting people with disabilities during a disaster ([www.fema.gov/rrr/assistf.shtm](http://www.fema.gov/rrr/assistf.shtm)).



More information is available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Emergency Preparedness and Response website, [www.bt.cdc.gov](http://www.bt.cdc.gov), and from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s consumer site, [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov). The Department of Health and Human Services website also features “Disasters and Emergencies” ([www.hhs.gov/disasters/index.shtml](http://www.hhs.gov/disasters/index.shtml)), a comprehensive list of resources.



For more on Pandemic Flu, including a personal planning checklist, visit [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov), the official U.S. government Web site for information on the topic.



Information about your own community’s preparedness policies can be found on city, county and state Office of Emergency Management websites. For a directory of state agencies, see [www.fema.gov/fema/statedr.shtm](http://www.fema.gov/fema/statedr.shtm).



For additional copies of this Factsheet and the companion Checklist, visit [www.AgingInStride.org](http://www.AgingInStride.org) or [www.AoA.gov](http://www.AoA.gov).

THIS FACTSHEET IS A SUPPLEMENT TO THE BOOK,  
*AGING IN STRIDE – PLAN AHEAD, STAY CONNECTED, KEEP MOVING.*

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ALSO AVAILABLE ONLINE AT [WWW.AOA.GOV](http://WWW.AOA.GOV) OR [WWW.AGINGINSTRIDE.ORG](http://WWW.AGINGINSTRIDE.ORG).

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## EMERGENCY READINESS CHECKLIST FOR OLDER ADULTS AND CAREGIVERS

Use this four-page form to: (1) organize your emergency preparations, (2) list your emergency contacts, and (3) keep a record of your current medications. You may want to give a copy to your main contact person or caregiver, if you have one. And don't forget to review and update this information often - at least every two or three months.

### STEP 1: KNOW THE BASICS

- \_\_\_\_\_ The most important disaster issues for the area where I live
- \_\_\_\_\_ The recommended life-saving responses for disasters that could strike with little or no warning.
- \_\_\_\_\_ If there were an evacuation order, the recommended route from where I live? My evacuation transportation options. The location of the nearest emergency shelter.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The location of shut-off valves for my household utilities (gas, electricity, water) and how to use them. (If they take a special tool, it should be kept right there, ready to use)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Designate an out-of-area emergency contact, in case local phone service is disrupted. Make sure my loved ones know the emergency communications plan.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Make it a point to meet my neighbors, in case we need to help one another in an emergency

### STEP 2: HAVE ESSENTIAL EMERGENCY SUPPLIES READY

*"Stay at Home" Emergency Supplies* - pull these items together for quick, easy access in your home; have quantities to last at least 3 to 6 days; rotate any items with expiration or "use by" dates:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| _____ drinking water                      | _____ light sticks                     |
| _____ food (non-perishable; ready to eat) | _____ waterproof matches               |
| _____ flashlight                          | _____ supply of prescription medicines |
| _____ portable radio                      | _____ current medications list         |
| _____ extra batteries                     | _____ cell phone                       |
| _____ first aid kit                       | _____ cash or traveler's checks        |
| _____ hand-operated can opener            | _____ emergency contacts list          |



*Evacuation Bag* – have a backpack or bag (preferably one on rollers) that has room for many of the items listed above and is also ready to go with these items:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> personal hygiene items, such as toilet paper, alcohol wipes, and gel hand sanitizer | <input type="checkbox"/> some breakfast bars              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> change of clothing  | <input type="checkbox"/> blanket or sleeping bag          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> compact rain slicker  | <input type="checkbox"/> disposable dust masks            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> good pair of walking shoes  | <input type="checkbox"/> copy of emergency contacts list  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> a bottle or two of water  | <input type="checkbox"/> copy of current medications list |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> spare pair of glasses            |

*Additional Precautions:*

- Gas tank kept at least half full
- Spare hearing aid batteries
- Emergency supply of pet food

**STEP 3: MAKE A PERSONAL PLAN**

- If I have any special needs, do I have a plan for meeting them in an emergency?
  - Mobility issues?
  - Reliance on medical equipment that requires electric power?
  - Incontinence supplies?
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- If I am receiving home health services, have I discussed emergency procedures with my home health provider?
- If I live in a senior living community, am I familiar with its emergency planning and procedures?

THIS CHECKLIST IS A SUPPLEMENT TO THE BOOK,  
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# EMERGENCY CONTACTS LIST

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Last Updated: \_\_\_\_\_

	<b>Name/Relationship</b>	<b>Phone</b>	<b>E-mail Address</b>
Primary Emergency Contact:			
Other Emergency Contacts:			
Healthcare Providers:			
Pharmacy:			
Homeowners insurance:			
Auto insurance:			

# CURRENT MEDICATIONS LIST

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Emergency Contact Name/Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Last Updated: \_\_\_\_\_

## Prescription Medications

<i>Name of Medication</i>	<i>Strength and Frequency</i>	<i>Taken For</i>	<i>Prescribed By</i>	<i>Notes</i>

## Allergies


## Pharmacy/Prescription Drug Plan


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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

AoA recognizes the importance of making information readily available to consumers, professionals, researchers, and students. Our website provides information for and about older persons, their families, and professionals involved in aging programs and services. For more information about AoA, please contact: US Dept of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging, Washington, DC 20201; phone: (202) 401-4541; fax (202) 357-3560; Email: [aoainfo@aoa.gov](mailto:aoainfo@aoa.gov); or contact our website at: [www.aoa.gov](http://www.aoa.gov).