



Emergency Preparedness for Older Adults

A Practical Guide to Help Plan, Respond and Recover



A disaster or an emergency can happen at any time, sometimes without warning. Thankfully, there are things you can do to be prepared, to respond safely and help speed your recovery.

This guide is designed to give you some practical tips about how to plan and prepare for your needs in a disaster or an emergency.

No two people are the same.

This guide will help you assess your abilities and potential factors you may need to consider in the event of an emergency. You will also be provided with important actions and steps to take before, during and after a disaster or an emergency.

Before a Disaster or an Emergency

Prepare and get ready now



Get informed

- **Identify likely emergencies:** Learn about the types of disasters or emergencies that could happen in your community.
- **Learn about your community and housing emergency response plans:** Find out about your community's guidance, response plans, evacuation routes and all available resources for preparing and responding to disasters. If you live in housing such as an apartment building or an assisted living residence, find out about the management's guidance and plans to prepare and respond to disasters or emergencies.
- **Sign up for alerts and warnings:** Learn how to receive national and local alerts and warnings. Understand the meaning of a “watch” and a “warning” and learn the actions you will take for disasters that are likely in your area.¹
- **Get trained:** Learn first aid, CPR and the response skills for local disasters that may occur. For most disasters, there are specific actions you can take to help protect yourself from the impact of that disaster.

Example

The guidance for an earthquake is to “drop, cover and hold on” to protect yourself from falling and from falling debris. In addition to the basic guidance, there might be alternate actions you should take depending on where you are. For example, if you are in bed:

- Stay in bed and cover yourself to protect from falling debris, or if you rely on a wheelchair, lock the wheels and cover yourself to protect yourself from falling debris. (see web site for training and protective actions for specific disasters).²

Assess your needs

- **Understand how your medical, physical and cognitive needs may affect your ability** to respond to a disaster or an emergency.³
- **Think about how you would respond:** Consider needs you may have if the power went out, if you had to stay home for two weeks or more. Or rather if you had to quickly evacuate your home or community.
 - Take an inventory of items you rely on like assistive devices that you would need to take with you if you evacuated include model information.
 - List all items that require electricity—such as refrigerated medicines, a continuous positive airway pressure therapy (CPAP) device or power wheelchair.
 - List all devices to take with you in an evacuation and consider light-weight or portable alternatives where possible.
 - Plan for battery or generator backup for all items and where you will go if these power sources will not last for an extended power outage.

Build your support network

- **Identify helpers:** Include family, friends, neighbours, carers and health professionals to help build your network and help you develop and support your plan.⁴
- **Meet with your helpers to plan together:** Talk about what kind of help you will need and how your helpers can assist you. You may also be able to help others, too.
- **Make a contact information list for your helpers** and plan how you will communicate regularly and during a disaster when some communications may be disrupted.⁵

Develop your plan

- **Plan for local disasters:** Consider all potential disasters in your area that could affect you including home fires, disasters and power outages. Plan for the actions you will take for each.⁶
- **Plan to stay or go:** Plan for emergencies where you will need to stay home for at least two weeks or evacuate. Consider what you will need in different types of disasters.
- **Plan for help to stay in your home:** Plan for how you will meet your needs if carers and health professionals are not able to come to your home and/or you cannot get access to essential medical and community services. If possible, get access to these services or identify a nearby friend or neighbour who can help you.
- **Plan for help to evacuate:** If you will need help evacuating or have medical devices that require power, plan for help. Find out if there are local registries and sign up so local responders will be aware of your needs.
- **Assess your power needs:** If you require power to operate medical devices or keep medicines cold, talk with your health professionals and an electrician or your utility company to make a backup power plan.
- **Learn how to turn off the water, gas and electricity** supply to your home. If your gas is turned off, only a gas utility professional may turn it back on.
- **Prepare for home fires:** Make sure you have smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors on every floor of your home, inside bedrooms and outside of sleeping areas.⁷
- **Know your property or renter's insurance:** Make sure you have disaster-specific coverage for your area, and the amount of coverage is enough for you.

Create an emergency contact list

- **Share your plan and contact information with your support network:** Plan more than one way to get in touch in case a disaster disrupts power, phone networks or internet access. Identify someone local to help with communication to local officials such as first responders, medical providers or building managers. Identify someone outside your local area who may be able to assist with communication when local access is disrupted.
- **Use alternate communication methods:** If available, use mobile phones to send texts, internet for emails or internet phone services.
- **Write down phone numbers for emergency services:** utilities, service providers, medical providers, veterinarians, insurance companies, your building or homeowner association managers, home repair professionals and other services.

Gather supplies you will need

- **Prepare emergency supplies to stay at home and a portable kit of supplies for evacuation:** Include basics such as food and water, first aid kit, flashlight, whistle, cash, a change of clothes and sturdy shoes. Make sure you have phone chargers, batteries and battery backup plans for all medical devices. Also include Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).⁹
- **Personalize your kit to address medical and personal needs:** Prepare a backup supply of medications. Talk to your pharmacist or healthcare provider to determine how many months you are allowed to get in advance. Plan for your food needs if you follow a special diet. Include additional items such as an extra pair of prescription eyewear, medical devices or any assistive devices such as a cane or other comfort items.
- **Gather enough items for yourself and everyone in your household,** including pets and service animals, for at least two weeks for staying at home. Have a lightweight kit for at least three days for an evacuation.

Prepare the documents you will need

- **Locate important documents:** Copy or scan all important documents including household identification (such as provincial identification, social insurance card, passports, permanent resident card, status cards, birth and marriage certificates), financial and legal (deeds, loans, credit cards, banking, wills, property insurance) and medical information (see below). Keep in mind, some of these documents are required for the receipt of financial assistance after disasters.
- **Gather medical information:** Keep an up-to-date list of your conditions, allergies, medications and dosages, health professionals, carers and health insurance cards. In addition, make copies of your written prescriptions before having them filled, or ask your doctor or pharmacist for a printed copy of all your prescribed medications — having this information on hand may make it easier to replace after a disaster.
- **Keep and share a contact list of people in your support network.**
- **Keep a copy of your plans.**
- **Safeguard documents:** Consider keeping paper documents in a fireproof and waterproof box or safe. You may also want to consider saving electronic copies of photos or important documents in a safe location (such as in a password protected secure cloud-based file, an encrypted USB or other secure device), or leaving with a trusted contact.





During an Emergency

Know how to respond

- **Stay informed:** Monitor television, radio and emergency alerts for disaster watches and warnings.¹⁰
 - If there is a watch issued, review your plan for that emergency and make any necessary changes in your activities to make sure you can quickly get to a safer place and can protect yourself.
 - If there is a warning issued, act immediately to follow your plan for that emergency.
- **Know how to take action to protect yourself:** If there are immediate dangers, use the response skills you have learned to protect yourself during that emergency.
- **Stay or go?** Be ready to stay at home or leave quickly in case you need to evacuate. Know how you will decide whether to stay or go including who will help you decide. If the power is out for an extended time or you do not have adequate air conditioning in a heat wave, or adequate heating during extreme cold, consider evacuating to an appropriate location.
- **Locate public shelters:** Relief organizations, like the Canadian Red Cross, may open shelters if an emergency affects many people or the emergency is expected to last several days. Be prepared to go to a shelter if:
 - Your area is without electrical power.
 - Police or other local officials tell you to evacuate.
 - Your home has been severely damaged.
- **Ask for help** and tell people what you need.



After an Emergency

Know how to recover

- **Return home safely:** Monitor news from authorities and only return home when authorities say it is safe to do so. Report broken gas, sewer, or water lines, and loose or dangling power wires to your local municipality.
- **Work with trusted sources:** Seek out resources and support from trusted sources such as the Red Cross and your local government; be aware of scams and take caution when sharing personal information.
- **Manage property damage:** If there is evidence of structural damage to your home, get a review by a trained inspector before you go back in and notify your insurance company right away.
- **If there has been an extended power outage,** throw out perishable food that may have been above 4 degrees Celsius for two hours or more.
- **Be aware of the risk of electrocution:** If there is water in the home, do not go in until you are sure the power is off at the main switch.
- **Only use a generator outdoors and away from windows.**
- **Document any property damage and contact your insurance company** to file a claim.
- **If you are clearing debris or cleaning,** follow safety precautions, wear protective clothing and always work with someone for safety.
- **Lean on your support network** to help you recover.

Tips for Carers

How to help with planning and response

- **Understand what you may be expected and required to do** to assist someone you support, including helping to develop a plan, prepare emergency supplies and documents to sign up for local registries and support their evacuation, etc.
- **Ensure you have received training in first aid and CPR**, how to use or operate assistive devices or medical equipment and how to support their personal care needs.
- **Know how to teach others to communicate effectively** with the person you care for who may require hearing, visual, speech or other communication adaptations.
- **Know how to provide additional emotional and behavioural support**, especially to help a person living with dementia, a disability or active mental health issues.
- **Have a current picture of the person you are caring for**, in case you get separated, and a copy of their essential medical and treatment information to access the right care. It may be helpful to discuss getting the person you support a personal or medical identification bracelet.



Resources

1, 4, 5, 6 **Prepare for Specific Disasters or Emergencies**

For more information on what to do during a disaster, go to www.redcross.ca/ready

3, 9 **Assess Your Needs Checklist**

Information on specific items to consider for your kit based on personal needs, go to www.redcross.ca/kit

7 **Home Fire Preparedness**

For more information on home fire preparedness, go to www.redcross.ca/ready

2, 8 **Types of Emergencies**

For more information on emergencies, go to www.redcross.ca/ready

10 **Stay informed**

Be prepared when an emergency happens.

Visit www.redcross.ca/ready for more information.

For more information, read “Closing the Gaps: Advancing Emergency Preparedness, Response and Recovery for Older Adults” available at <https://www.nia-ryerson.ca/reports>.

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Canadian Red Cross

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Our Mission

We help people and communities in Canada and around the world in times of need and support them in strengthening their resilience.