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Winter Weather Emergencies

It's that time of year. As the wind howls and the snow falls, the possibility of power outages looms. Are you prepared with a well-stocked food supply? Tailor your supply of food to the type of things your family normally eats. Familiar foods can lift morale and give a feeling of security, even in the height of a storm.

Build up your reserves by buying a few extra items each week until you have a supply large enough to feed your family for three to seven days. Consider whether there is anyone in your household with special diets or allergies that you need to accommodate. Buy foods that require no refrigeration and little or no preparation or cooking.

If the power goes out, open the refrigerator and freezer as little as possible. Eat the most perishable items first, such as leftovers, meat, poultry and food containing milk, cream, sour cream, or soft cheese.

For emergency cooking, you can use a fireplace, wood stove, barbeque grill, or camp stove. Never use a barbeque inside the house. You can also heat food with candle warmers, chafing dishes and fondue pots, but be careful about fire safety. Canned food can be eaten right out of the can. Make sure you have a manual can opener available in your emergency supplies. If you heat the can, be sure to open it and remove the label first.

Despite your best efforts, the food in your freezer may thaw before power is restored. Foods that have completely thawed, but are still cold may be eaten or refrozen if the following conditions are met: fruits may be eaten or refrozen if they still taste and smell good. Vegetables should not be eaten or refrozen if thawed completely, since bacteria can multiply rapidly in them. Meat and poultry should be thrown away if color or odor is questionable, or if it has been warmer than 40 degrees Fahrenheit for more than two hours. Fish and shellfish should not be eaten or refrozen if thawed completely.

Remember the general rule: When in doubt, throw it out! Make sure to check your expiration dates on canned foods every six months.

For more information on food safety during a weather emergency, visit on-line at www.nyhealth.gov or call:

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