



Would you be prepared if an emergency struck? Would you know what to do before, during, and after a disaster to ensure your survival? Would you know where to find shelter, food, and water for you, your family, and your pets? Does your community have specific evacuation routes that you would need to follow in the event that other roads become impassable? Do you have phone numbers and email addresses handy for local emergency agencies like the Red Cross or your local emergency management office? Do you need to have a NOAA (National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration) weather radio on hand that can alert you to impending, potentially disastrous weather heading your way? Do you know which TV and radio channels will broadcast public information if an emergency or a weather event closes schools and businesses?

If you are a senior citizen or someone with a disabling chronic illness, it is even more challenging to find yourself part of a disastrous event, and so it is all the more important that you start thinking and planning for such a possibility now. Being prepared will help keep anxiety and fear to a minimum so that you can remain as calm as possible. It may even save your life and the lives of loved ones and help you deal with any loss of property that might accompany a disastrous event.

Depending upon where you live, there are different types of emergencies for which to prepare. Different regions of the country are at the mercy of potentially catastrophic weather-related events, year in and year out. Southern states contend with hurricanes, extreme heat, draughts, wildfires, and tornadoes. Tornadoes are also real threats in Midwestern states as well. Flooding has become a major issue over the last several years, especially for those living in Eastern and Mid-Atlantic states. Winter weather can bring extremely cold temperatures along with ice storms that knock out the power for days and fell trees which may severely damage your home or vehicles. If you live in the West and Northwest, you may find yourself contending with

earthquakes, volcanoes, landslides, or wildfires with accompanying smoke that can damage or destroy not only your property but your health as well. Of course, anyone, anywhere, at any time can fall victim to a pandemic flu; to biological, chemical, or nuclear hazards; or to unthinkable terrorist attacks. To help determine your risks based on where you live, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) offers a "Map Service Center." Go online to: www.fema.gov/hazard/index.shtm.

Contingency Planning

Since you may be required to flee your home at a moment's notice, it is prudent to assemble a disaster supply kit in an easy-to-carry container which includes all the important items you will need to take with you. It takes time and careful thought to prepare such a kit, so waiting until the very last minute is a bad idea.

If you do have to flee your home, do you know what important files you'll want to take with you? You will need information about your homeowner and vehicle insurance coverage, titles and deeds, financial information, personal papers including your birth certificate and passport, medical records, and medical insurance and Medicare cards. Your kit



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should also include flashlights, batteries (including hearing aid and wheelchair batteries if applicable), extra eyeglasses, and a battery-powered radio. Experts on emergency preparedness suggest that you allot one gallon of water per person per day and have a three-day supply of non-perishable food, avoiding any salted foods that may make you thirsty. Be sure to stock canned foods, dry mixes, and foods that do not require refrigeration or cooking. In an emergency situation, commercially bottled water has been deemed the safest as well as the most reliable. Water and stored foods in your kit should be changed every six months so that they stay fresh and don't expire. Don't forget a can opener, waterproof kitchen matches, and a first aid kit. Hopefully you will never find yourself in a situation where you need to use your kit, but it is far better to be prepared for the possibility.

School children are required to participate in fire drills so that they know exactly where to go in the event of a fire. The same should hold true in your home, starting with the identification of an evacuation route. Are you maintaining the smoke detectors in your home on a regular basis? Do you have a fire extinguisher handy, and do you or other family members know how to use it? During a fire is not the time to try to figure out just how it operates, especially if you are disabled. You should also know where the utility cutoff valve is in your home and how to turn it off if the situation calls for it.

If you are a pet owner, then you already know that animals are an important part of the family. For persons who are disabled or suffer with a chronic illness or live alone, having one or more pets can make all the difference in the world. While pets are typically not allowed in emergency shelters, many hotels do allow them, so be sure to know where you and your cat or dog are welcome. It is also important to carry your pet's health records with you including a list of vaccinations and some form of ID. Pets should have proper provisions such as adequate food, water, and other supplies. Be sure to include a pet carrier and a leash for use in an emergency. Just like you, your pets need to have their medications with them when they travel. Consider assembling an animal emergency supply kit and developing a pet care buddy system with neighbors or relatives for when emergencies arise, and you are unable to care for or evacuate the animals yourself.

Families should also compile a communication plan so each of its members knows how to reach

the others if a disaster strikes. This plan would contain contact information for each family member at school and/or work and cell phone numbers. Because it's possible that local phone networks or internet service providers may be down or very busy during or after a disaster, it's also a good idea to have an out-of-town contact whom you can call to tell you are safe. You can also relay messages to others who would be checking in with them. You can find sample forms to record this information on the internet at www.redcross.org or from the FEMA website at www.fema.gov/areyouready. There is also an *Are You Ready?* guide there which is available in English and Spanish. You can also contact the FEMA distribution center at (800) 480-2520 for copies. The FEMA Community and Family Preparedness Program educates the general public about disaster awareness and preparedness. FEMA provides opportunities, information, and tools so that other organizations and agencies can educate the public about disaster preparedness.

It's also not a bad idea to have a prepaid phone card and some coins available to call the person you have designated as your emergency contact, also known as an ICE (In Case of Emergency). Your ICE should be programmed into your cell phone where it should be listed by ICE and not by name. Emergency personnel will often check a person's ICE listing on their cell phone to reach someone you know. Also, teach family members how to text on a cell phone as text messages may be able to get around network disruptions when you are not able to get through with a phone call.

You In An Emergency

All of the above applies to almost everyone, but for a person who is challenged by disabilities or a chronic illness or who has special needs, the equation for emergency preparedness becomes much more complicated. As most people with fibromyalgia (FM) know, any task can prove to be physically exhausting, and so when planning for an emergency, you must think first, pace yourself, and try to avoid doing too much all at once to avoid a flare-up of your symptoms. Otherwise, you will end up in a state of extreme pain and exhaustion.

Disabled or not, if you are someone without a vehicle, you are even more vulnerable in an emergency situation, and you will need to identify accessible modes of transportation. Is there a transit system nearby that can take you to a local shelter

or evacuate you to a location outside the affected area?

If at all possible, establish a support system comprised of family members, trusted friends and neighbors, and/or co-workers who can help out at a moment's notice. One of them should have a key to your home or apartment. Think carefully about what other types of needs you might have in an emergency situation. If certain resources or utilities were not available, would you be able to maintain any kind of independence? Would you have an alternative place to stay?

If you have fibromyalgia or related conditions, make sure those in your support network know what your special needs are and provide them with a medical information list that contains contact information for your doctors and other health care providers, a list of your existing medical conditions, and your medications and their dosage instructions. You should have at least a seven-day supply of your medications available to you. Be sure to make a note of any allergies you may have and what adaptive equipment you may use. Wear medical alert tags or bracelets to help others identify your disability. They will also need to know whom to call should they find you unconscious or unable to speak. Do you have people that are willing to check in with you regularly? List the names and phone numbers of out of the area contacts along with everyone else in your network.

Take time now to realistically evaluate your needs and think about any obstacles and other hazards your home or workplace may have that could keep you from safely leaving during an emergency. If you are able, secure or remove furniture or other objects that could block your path when you are attempting to leave. Also, contact your local government's emergency information management office as many local offices compile lists of people with disabilities so they can be located quickly in a sudden emergency. Such an office may also have the ability to send instant text emails or alerts to keep you abreast of local emergencies as well as other things like road closings and bad weather.



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Where To Turn

❖ **www.disabilityinfo.gov** is an excellent online resource designed to provide people with disabilities quick and easy access to information they need. Under its “Emergency Preparedness” link (under “Community Life”), you’ll find *30 Tips for Emergency Preparedness* offered by the Department of Homeland Security as well as other excellent topics such as the following:

- *Accommodating People With Disabilities In Disasters: A Reference Guide To Federal Law*: a guide summarizing equal access requirements for people with disabilities relating to disaster care, housing and human services;

- *Administration On Aging (AoA) Emergency Preparedness & Response Information*: which includes *Just in Case: Emergency Readiness for Older Adults and Caregivers* along with links to other federal departments and national relief agencies, as well as links that show you how to create an evacuation plan and how to develop a family communications plan;

- www.DisasterAssistance.gov, a secure, user-friendly U.S. Government web portal that consolidates disaster assistance information in one place (also can be accessed as www.disasterhelp.gov)

❖ **Ready America**, located at www.ready.gov/america/getakit/disabled.html helps people with disabilities and special needs *Prepare, Plan, Stay Informed*. For example, if you are someone who receives federal benefits such as Social Security, you are advised to have those benefits paid electronically so that in the event mail delivery is disrupted, you will still have access to your funds. According to *Ready America*, the U.S. Treasury recommends two safe ways to do this. The first and best option for people on Social Security who have bank accounts is to have your monthly payment direct deposited to a checking or savings account. You can sign up by calling (800) 333-1795 or by visiting the following website: www.godirect.org. For those who don't have a bank account, “Direct Express” is a prepaid debit card option which has been designed as a safe, easy alternative to paper checks. To sign up, call (877) 212-9991, or visit: www.USDirectexpress.com.

❖ **CERT:** Find out if your community has a Community Emergency Response Team or CERT (part of the Citizen Corp program) which helps to ensure that you have a safe home, neighborhood, and community. CERT volunteers have learned how to provide immediate response to disaster victims and have usually learned how to gather information for first responders when they arrive on the scene. For more information, go to: www.citizencorps.gov.

Living through a disaster can be very stressful and can manifest itself in different ways that include difficulty sleeping, depression/sadness, being overwhelmed, or fearful. There are many considerations to be addressed when returning home after a disaster that are equally as important as being prepared for one. For tips on how to proceed once you have arrived home, which starts before you even open your front door, and for information on disaster assistance resources, go to www.fema.gov/areyouready/recovering_from_disaster.shtm, or contact the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, or FEMA. This is a good time to make use of your support systems or group, family, and friends. Remember to be kind to yourself and to take things slowly.



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Other Resources

I. Emergency Essentials at <http://beprepared.com> offers several emergency kits for purchase, including “Preparedness Education,” “Build Your Own First Aid Kit,” and more. It also has available for purchase dehydrated and freeze-dried foods as well as MRE (Meals Ready to Eat).

At http://beprepared.com/article.asp_Q_ai_E_270 you can find out about emergency preparedness in your state. At <http://preparednesspantry.blogspot.com> you can join the “Preparedness Pantry Blog.” You can also contact them at:

Emergency Essentials, Inc.
653 North 1500 West
Orem, Utah 84057
Tel: (801) 222-9596 (Corporate offices)
Fax: (801) 222-9598
Toll-free customer order line: (800) 999-1863

II. At www.quickseries.com you can order pocket-size reference guides. Over 300 titles in four languages are available and include *Emergency Preparedness for the Disabled* to “help you develop an emergency plan, conduct a self-assessment, build a personal support network, and teach you emergency kit essentials, communication tips as well as how to be ready for an evacuation.” This guide is 24 laminated pages and costs \$7.66. Other samplings of Quickseries include *Disaster Preparedness, Hurricane Preparedness, Fire Safety and Emergency Action Plans, Public Health Emergencies, Disaster Recovery*, and *Effective Fatigue Management*. Contact them at:

In the United States:

QuickSeries Publishing
3325 Griffin Road, Suite 222
Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33312
Tel: (954) 584-1606 or (800) 361-4653, toll-free
Fax: (954) 584-2520 or (877) 329-3291, toll-free
Email: luxart@quickseries.com

In Canada:

QuickSeries Publishing
1855 St-Regis Rd.
Dollard-des-Ormeaux (QC)
H9B 2M9 CANADA
Tel: (514) 685-7776
Fax: (514) 685-7976

III. At [www.prepare.org/disabilities/disabilities .htm](http://www.prepare.org/disabilities/disabilities.htm) you'll find tips developed by the Independent Living Resource Center San Francisco for people with all types of disabilities.

Evacuation Preparedness: Taking Responsibility For Your Safety: A Guide For People With Disabilities and Other Activity Limitations, by June Isaacson Kailes, is published by:

Center for Disability Issues and
the Health Professions
Western University of Health Sciences
309 E. Second St.
Pomona, CA 91766-1854
Tel: (909) 469-5380
TTY: (909) 469-5520
Fax: (909) 469-5407

This material is also available at www.cdihp.org. For a hard copy, send a check payable to "CDIHP" for \$24.00 (includes postage/tax) to the address above. Bulk pricing or international orders available.

IV. When Disaster Strikes (FEMA publication L-217) provides information about volunteer organizations and donations. Contact FEMA:

FEMA
500 C Street SW
Washington, DC 20472
Tel: (202) 646-2500

V. The National Council on Disability (NCD) offers many publications on ways that communities and people with disabilities can be safer. Visit its website at www.ncd.gov/newsroom/publications/index_subject.htm#5, or write them at:

National Council on Disability
1331 F Street, NW, Suite 850
Washington, DC 20004
Tel: (202) 272-2004
TTY: (202) 272-2074
Fax: (202) 272-2022

Important Note: The NCD's upcoming report on emergency management and people with disabilities will be released on August 12, 2009, at the International Association of Emergency Managers' 2009 National Conference on Community Preparedness—The Power of the Citizen Corps, to be held at the Hyatt Regency Crystal City in Arlington, VA. Watch for updates on this report!



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VI. The National Resource Center on Advancing Emergency Preparedness for Culturally Diverse Communities offers a host of useful resources. Visit its website at www.diversitypreparedness.org/Community/Community/38/communityId__9797/ where you can sign up for its e-newsletter to stay updated on "new efforts, resources, events, and news in the field." Browse this site by language, by type of emergency, by topic, by state, or by organizations. [Diversitypreparedness.org](http://www.diversitypreparedness.org) can also be found on *Twitter* at <http://twitter.com/diversityprep>.

VII: "Prepare for the unexpected" is the theme of www.GetReadyGear.com. It was founded by experienced emergency responders who are dedicated to the premise that every family and business should take the time to plan for emergencies. They have trained thousands of people in emergency preparedness and have experienced first hand the devastation of man-made and natural disasters. 72-hour kits and supplies for purchase.

GetReady Gear
PO Box 51
Wilton, CA 95693
Tel: (916) 690-8110 or (800)344-3907
Fax: (916) 690-8120
Email: info@getreadygear.com

VIII. Checklists: Want a simple checklist of emergency items for planning purposes? Go to:

www.fema.gov/areyouready/appendix_b.shtm

www.getreadygear.com/pdffdocs/Disaster%20Supplies%20Checklist%20102308.pdf

Don't have computer access? Mail a #10 business-sized envelope with 61-cents postage to the National Fibromyalgia Partnership, and we will send copies to you.