

History is littered with stories of communities that believed they were too smart or too strong to be vulnerable. And no matter how advanced humanity becomes, this has not changed. Even in modern civilization we have seen thousands or millions of people who suddenly found themselves refugees. Just in recent memory unprepared people have fled from ice storms in Texas, war in Europe and Africa, volcanoes in Hawaii and Iceland, hurricanes in the eastern United States, wildfires in CA, OR, and WA, and of course, widespread rioting in 2020 by well organized groups making communities unlivable and who are even now preparing for the next opportunity.

But the point here is to illustrate, not to frighten. We know ‘if we are prepared we shall not fear’.

In our most basic preparedness is a 72 hour kit – sometimes called go bags or bugout bags. Whenever possible, in the face of disaster we should stay home and shelter in place. That way we can take advantage of our support community (family, church, friends, etc.) and the protection a home provides; and where, presumably, we’ve got at least a few days of food. But we can never predict the severity or duration an emergency could bring, and we must face the possibility that we have to leave, if temporarily at least.

### **Why 72 Hours?**

Seventy two hours is the expected length of time for government and large relief organizations to organize and arrive, though 72 hours is certainly not guaranteed. It could also be the time it takes to leave town and find a safer place.

For a thought experiment, consider: When the Chernobyl nuclear power plant exploded and flung radioactive contamination all over the nearby city called Pripyat, the government rolled hundreds of buses into town and told the 50,000 people living there that they had a couple hours to collect a few personal things and leave. To make matters worse, their government deceived them, telling them the situation was temporary and they’d be back in three days. They were never allowed to return. Knowing what we know, what would you take?

Since whole books and websites have been written about it, I have no intention of telling you what to take. There are dozens of lists online and they’re all slightly

different, so I'm not going to rewrite that dictionary. I also wouldn't presume to tell you what you need because your bugout bag would likely look different than mine. So my focus here will be about organization and strategy.

## **Your Plan**

For all the diverse online lists just mentioned, I'm surprised how many of them don't discuss planning, and then practicing your plan. We've all heard "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail". If you must leave your house, I'd think the first consideration would be where you're going. What route will you take? If my plan was to leave this city and head to my nearest family member, four hours away by car, it's impossible for me to get there without crossing rivers. Should I plan to cross rivers, or should I change my destination? If roads were impassable by car, I'd have to evacuate on foot. How much can I carry? If the infrastructures that we rely on so heavily were disabled, how would we get information? How would we communicate? If we're separated, have we planned a meeting place? All this affects what goes in my bag.

Once you've got your bugout bag planned, it's time to practice. The US Marines have a saying: Ounces equal pounds and pounds equal pain. How much stuff can you carry, and what can you live without? Can you buy smaller equipment that's just as effective? If you take your bag for a hike up a few hills, you'll easily discover what your limits are. When you get home, rearrange your bag, plan another hike. Find your endurance limits. Consider changing your lifestyle to keep yourself in better physical condition, if necessary. Remember that everyone in your family doesn't need to pack everything. You probably only need one first aid kit, one compass, one bar of soap, etc.

And one final thing, a 72 hour kit has many things in it that are useful for camping. People tend to raid their bag for leisure activities with the intention of returning those items later. A better strategy would be to stock your bag with things that will stay put. Then you've given yourself the peace of mind in knowing everything is there when you need it. Camping items are fun to buy and test. Get to know what works best for you, and then keep it all together.

Pro-Tip: Compartmentalize your 72 hour kit. If you keep like items in ziploc bags, you keep categories together, you waterproof your stuff, and used bags are handy for collecting things or accumulating trash.

## **What Shall We Eat?**

Of course, besides the bag itself, food and water are the primary considerations. You've heard that humans can survive three days without water and three weeks without food. While technically true, if you try it your travails will end long before that. After two days without water your internal systems will begin malfunctioning. After a couple days without food, mental abilities lose their edge, morale and motivation degrade, along with immune functions.

Water is one of the heaviest things you can put in your bag. We're told that adults should drink a minimum of half a gallon per day – that doesn't include water for hygiene. Most folks simply don't want to put 1.5 gallons (about 12 pounds) of water on their back. Finding and cleaning water is essential. Never trust an unknown water source to be safe. Plan your success ahead of time: Consider water sources along your bugout route. Buy lightweight items that can clean acquired water – filters, purification tablets, etc. Many people plan to boil water, which is a viable option, but it also requires fuel, a fireproof container, and the time spent heating and then cooling.

The best bugout bag foods are lightweight and long lasting. Freeze dried camping meals are lightweight, tasty and have a shelf life up to 25 years. But they require cooking, which means you're carrying water and fuel. Military style MRE's are ready immediately and can be heated without a fire. They are generally considered slightly less tasty than freeze dried meals, and have a shelf life of a few years.

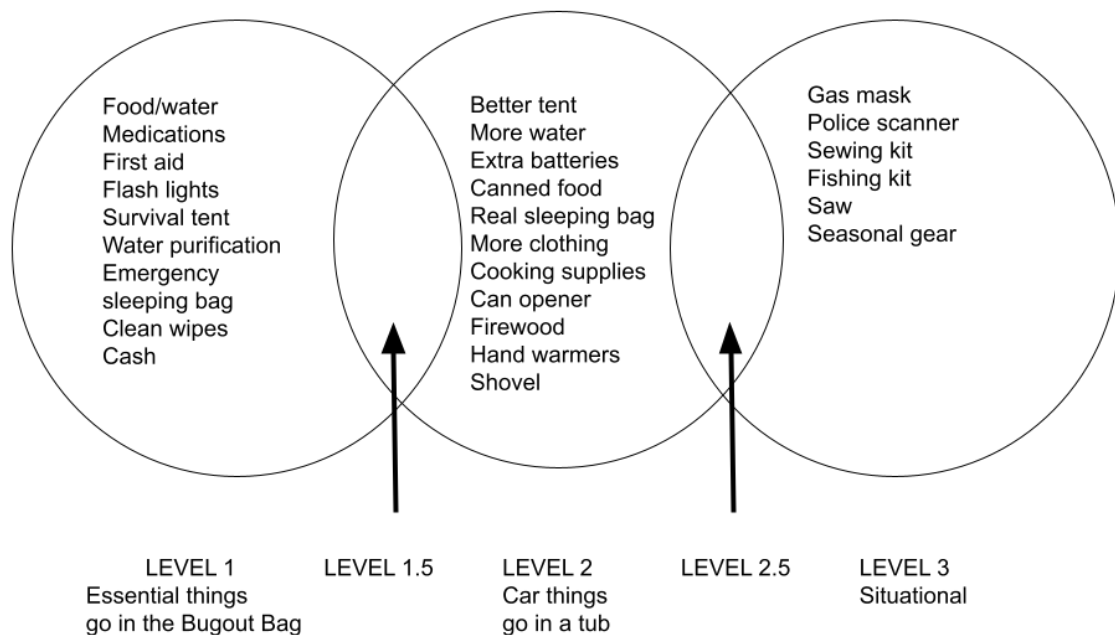
You can make your own meals from supermarket items – Minute Rice, dehydrated potato pouches, Lipton dried soups, oatmeal packets, granola bars. Some of these things require pans/fuel/utensils and should be rotated every year or two, but this is a far cheaper option than purpose-built meals.

Canned food is comparatively very heavy and inconvenient to carry, but very durable, animal-proof, and can last years past the expiration date.

A note about store bought survival kits: I don't recommend ready-made kits. I find that when things are sold as a kit many essentially useless items are included just to inflate the total number of items. I also find that many so-called survival kits are dishonest about the effectiveness of their tools, and the items are often cheaply made. Buy and test to find things you can trust.

## Organizing Your Kit and Strategy

To prioritize our kit items, use an organizational strategy. If we must leave our homes, we will almost certainly leave by car. If roads become impassable, we will be on foot. We can build our kits according to these contingencies. In the diagram below, Level 1 is the absolute essentials: Food, water, medications, money, first aid, etc. They go in the bugout bag. If there's not enough room or the bag is too heavy, reconsider how essential they are. We simply can't carry everything for every possibility.



Level 1.5: The maybes. Inevitably, we find ourselves trying to decide whether some things are worth their weight and/or volume. (Do I need a sleeping mat? Solar phone charger? Rain poncho?) These are the gray area things we're trying to decide whether they are essential or not. If they are essential and you can carry more stuff, include them in the bag. If not, bump them to Level 2.

Level 2: Further prep. These items are generally not absolutely essential but still good preparedness. They go in a plastic tub and are stored in the same area as the bugout bag. When disaster strikes and evacuation is necessary, the bag and tub go into the car. If you get down the road and find that highway travel is impossible, leave the car and the tub behind. You've still got your essentials.

Level 2.5 and Level 3: Situational items. There are some situations or times of the year that a heavy coat or fishing supplies will be useless. In some disasters a chainsaw or an inflatable raft would be critical. Strictly speaking, these items might not be part of a 72 hour kit, but could be stored in an adjacent area or separate tub, ready to go in a hurry.

## **Conclusion**

With a bit of planning, we can make giant strides toward self reliance. We can have fun building our kits with our family and we can learn just how many options there are. Then when disaster strikes, we'll have no need to fear.

For your convenience, here is a list of possible kit items, gleaned from several websites.

Water bottle, water purification, three days of food, utensils, cooking pans, pot scrubber, can opener, camp stove/fuel, clothing, hat, gloves, poncho, tarp, tent, sleeping pad, blanket, sleeping bag, fire starter, first aid, insect repellent, wet napkins, hand sanitizer, camp soap, hygiene/signal mirror, towel, toilet paper, toothbrush, other hygiene supplies, survival knife, ax, flashlight, tea candles, solar lantern, batteries, cell phone, two way radio, emergency radio, cash/credit card, map, compass, note pad and pencil, pepper spray/defense items, paracord, duct tape, large trash bags, sunglasses, N95 face mask, sewing kit, fishing kit, binoculars, face paint, snare wire, hand warmers, first aid, important documents, prescription drugs, cell phone charger, bleach, allergy goods/ vitamins, zip ties, hammer, shovel, saw, rope, scissors, pictures of home before disaster, plastic sheeting, pliers, baby formula/diapers, pet food, sturdy shoes, fire extinguisher, books, games, activities, family contact information