

20 Items Preppers Buy Too Late (And What to Grab Now Instead)

When disaster looms – be it a sudden storm, pandemic lockdown, or grid failure – people rush out in a frenzy to snap up supplies. If you’ve ever arrived even a day late, you know the scene: **empty shelves, long lines, and quiet panic.**¹ It doesn’t take much for crucial goods to vanish overnight.² The problem is, many **preppers and the unprepared alike** realize the need for certain items only *after* the crisis hits, when it’s already too late. We saw this during the pandemic (remember the great toilet paper shortage?) and before countless hurricanes and blackouts. By then, you’re left with slim pickings and regret.



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The key to survival is **acting before the emergency**, not during. In this article, we’ll walk through **20 items that are often bought far too late** – and more importantly, **what smarter alternatives you should stock up on now instead**. Each item comes with urgent, practical advice to help you **stay ahead of the panic**. Whether you live in a city apartment or on a rural homestead, these tips will cover how to prepare *today* so you’re not stuck wishing you had later. Let’s dive in and

ensure that the next time disaster is on the horizon, you'll be calm at home while others fight over the last bottle of water.



1. Bottled Water – Store Water and Purification Systems Now

Bought Too Late:

Bottled water is usually the **first thing to disappear in any emergency**. The moment there's news of a hurricane or contamination, people empty store shelves of water jugs.³ If you wait until the last minute, you'll find nothing but a "Sold Out" sign – or hugely inflated prices.

Grab Now Instead:

[Secure a water supply before crisis hits.](#) Start by storing at **least one gallon per person per day** for 3–7 days (more if you have space).⁴ You can fill durable containers or buy water bricks and keep them in a cool, dark place. For urban preppers tight on space, even a few flat water storage bags under the

bed are better than nothing. Next, invest in a **reliable water purification method**. Don't count on being able to buy bottled water later – **get a quality gravity-fed filter or portable purifier now** (brands like LifeStraw or Berkey are popular).⁵ Water purification tablets and unscented bleach (for treating water) are cheap to stockpile and invaluable if your stored water runs low. Rural preppers with a well should have a manual pump or generator backup to draw water when the grid's down. Urban dwellers should scope out alternate water sources (nearby ponds, public pools, etc.) *beforehand* and have the means to filter that water. The bottom line: **water is life** – don't rely on frantic last-minute runs. Store it, filter it, and you won't go thirsty when taps run dry.



2. Flashlights and Batteries – Rechargeables and Solar Lighting

Bought Too Late:

As soon as the power goes out, **flashlights and batteries fly off store shelves**. Every blackout or hurricane warning sees people panic-buying D-cells and cheap flashlights.⁶ The unprepared are left in the dark or resorting to unsafe

candles. If you wait until lights out, you'll be competing for whatever dim flashlight remains.

Grab Now Instead:

Light up your life *before* an emergency. **Stock up on quality LED lighting now.** Good options are LED flashlights, headlamps (for hands-free tasks), and lanterns for area lighting. Get a **stash of batteries** – and prioritize **rechargeable batteries with a solar charger.**⁷ A small solar panel or hand-crank charger can keep your lights (and critical electronics) running indefinitely, a huge advantage for both urban apartments and off-grid cabins. **Place flashlights in key rooms** of your home now, so you're never stumbling around.⁸ Also, consider motion-sensor lights or solar garden lamps that charge by day and can be brought indoors at night. Don't forget to test your gear regularly – a flashlight with dead batteries is as useful as a paperweight. By preparing versatile, renewable lighting ahead of time, you won't be left in darkness when the grid fails. (And as a bonus, you'll avoid the fire hazard of candles – which in any case tend to sell out quickly during emergencies.)



3. Gasoline – Safe Fuel Reserves and Alternatives

Bought Too Late:

The moment an evacuation is announced or a major storm approaches, **gas station lines stretch for miles**. Panicked drivers top off their tanks and fill gas cans. In these rushes, stations run dry fast – in one recent hurricane, **17% of Florida gas stations ran out of fuel within a single day of panic-buying.**⁹ If you're trying to buy gasoline at the last minute, you could be out of luck or stuck in hour-long lines (only to find empty pumps).

Grab Now Instead:

Plan your fuel needs in advance. First, never let your vehicle's gas tank fall below half during times of potential crisis. Keeping it topped off gives you a built-in reserve. Next, if you have the property and legal allowance (this is easier rural than in a city), **store some gasoline safely now.** Use proper **fuel containers** and add a stabilizer so gas stays usable for 12+ months. Rotate your stock periodically. This stash can feed your generator or vehicle when stations are empty. Urban preppers or those without fuel storage space might consider a small **fuel siphon kit** – in dire straits you could extract gasoline from your lawnmower or car for other uses (or from abandoned vehicles, if it ever came to that). Additionally, invest in **fuel alternatives**: a dual-fuel generator (propane/gasoline) or a solar power station means you're not solely reliant on gas. **Solar generators** (basically big battery packs charged by solar panels) have become a viable option – no fuel needed. If you must evacuate by car, having extra gas cans pre-filled can be a lifesaver on jammed highways. The lesson: when everyone else is scrambling for a last drop of fuel, you'll be ready to roll because you secured

your supply *ahead of time*.



4. Generators – Backup Power Before the Storm

Bought Too Late:

Portable generators become hot-ticket items the moment a severe storm or blackout is forecast. Walk into any hardware store right after a big power outage and you'll see empty spots where generators used to be. During the Texas freeze and other disasters, there were *mad rushes* for generators and even propane heaters, with retailers selling out as soon as new shipments arrived.^{10 11} If you wait for the lights to go out or the winter cold to set in, finding a generator (at a reasonable price) will be near impossible.

Grab Now Instead:

Invest in reliable backup power now, during the calm. If you own a home (especially in rural areas prone to outages), consider installing a generator *before* you need it. Even a smaller portable generator can keep your fridge, critical appliances, or medical devices running. Look for dual-fuel models if possible – they offer flexibility during fuel shortages. **Urban prepper?** You might not be able to run a loud gas generator in an apartment, so look into a **solar-powered generator (power station)**. These high-capacity battery banks, paired with solar panels, can silently power small devices and some appliances without fumes – perfect for indoor use. At a minimum, have a **power inverter** that can draw from your car's battery to run electronics in a pinch. Whatever solution fits your situation, acquire it now and learn to use it safely. *Test run your generator* occasionally (and keep fuel for it, see item #3) so you're confident it works. Backup power is one of those things that brings immense peace of mind: when the whole neighborhood is dark, you won't be the one desperately searching for a generator – you'll be the one who planned ahead and kept the lights on.



5. Bread, Milk and Eggs – Shelf-Stable Foods and DIY Alternatives

Bought Too Late:

Whenever a winter storm or crisis is looming, the classic staples of **bread, milk, and eggs** fly off grocery shelves. These perishables are so routinely panic-bought that it's a running joke (people preparing for a storm as if they're planning to live on French toast!). **Bread goes quickly because it's familiar, filling, and perishable**¹², milk and eggs vanish because they're daily basics that spoil without refrigeration.¹³ If you rush out late to grab these, you'll find empty racks in the bakery aisle and nothing but maybe some powdered milk nobody wanted.

Grab Now Instead:

[Stock up on shelf-stable alternatives and ingredients.](#) Instead of loaves of fresh bread that turn moldy, store **flour, yeast, baking powder, and salt** in your pantry so you can bake your own bread if needed.¹⁴ Even a simple no-knead bread recipe can produce fresh bread when stores are closed. Keep some **tortillas** or **cracker packs** as they last longer than bread. For milk, buy **shelf-stable options** like **powdered milk** or **UHT milk cartons**.¹⁵ Powdered milk can be reconstituted with water and lasts a long time on the shelf – not the tastiest for drinking, but excellent for cooking or cereals. Canned evaporated milk is another alternative. For eggs, consider **egg substitutes** or **powdered eggs** (yes, they exist and are used for baking or scrambles when fresh eggs aren't available).¹⁶ Another tactic: *freeze what you can*. Milk can be frozen (just don't fill the container to the brim), and you can actually crack eggs and freeze them in ice cube trays for later use.¹⁷

If you have the ability and long-term mindset, raising a few chickens or quail can provide a renewable egg supply (quail are small and even workable in some urban backyards)¹⁸ – but that's a bigger project. At minimum, **don't rely on last-minute grocery runs for these basics.** Have ingredients and durable replacements now, and you'll still have bread and milk for your coffee when everyone else is staring at barren shelves.



6. Canned Goods and Ready-to-Eat Meals – Build a Pantry Now

Bought Too Late:

In the early stages of any disaster, people grab **canned meat, soups, beans, veggies, and instant meals** like their lives depend on it – because in a way, they do. These shelf-stable foods provide quick nutrition and comfort when fresh food is unavailable. Naturally, **canned goods are among the first aisles to be cleaned out** during panic-buying.¹⁹ The same goes for things like cereal, granola bars, and jarred foods – anything that can be eaten with minimal cooking. If you wait until everyone is frantically shopping, you'll be greeted by

rows of empty metal shelves where canned goods used to be.

Grab Now Instead:

Gradually stock a robust emergency pantry in advance. Canned and packaged foods last years and are easy to accumulate a little at a time. Each grocery trip, throw in a few extra cans of your regular staples (beans, tuna, stew, vegetables, fruit – whatever you and your family will eat). This way you build your stockpile **before** a crisis, not during. **Rotate your cans** by expiration date – put newer purchases at the back so you use older ones first.²⁰ Also diversify: include high-calorie ready-to-eat items like peanut butter, canned chili, and energy bars. Think about **meals that require little or no cooking** (since in a disaster you may have limited fuel). Classics like canned soups or pasta meals can be heated over a simple camp stove (see item #18) or even eaten cold if it comes to it. Don't neglect comfort foods entirely – a can of fruit cocktail or some chocolate can boost morale. For longer-term resilience, consider stocking some **freeze-dried meals or MREs** (Meals Ready to Eat), which were also in high demand during recent crises and tend to sell out. The goal is to create your own “store” at home. In an urban apartment, this might mean filling a closet or under-bed bins with canned food; in a rural home, maybe shelving in a cellar. When disaster strikes, you won't need to race to the supermarket – you'll simply “shop” your pantry, calmly and well-fed.



7. Dry Staples (Rice, Pasta, Flour) – Bulk Up and Preserve Them

Bought Too Late:

Along with canned goods, staples like **rice, beans, pasta, and grains** get snatched up quickly at the first hint of trouble. These basics are cheap, filling, and versatile – which means everyone wants them in an emergency. You’ve probably seen the picked-over shelves where bags of rice or noodles used to be. Flour and baking supplies also turn scarce once store-bought bread is gone.²¹ If you procrastinate, you could be left without these foundation foods (and they’re hard to improvise or substitute).

Grab Now Instead:

Buy dry staples in bulk now, and store them properly for the long haul. A 20-pound bag of rice or a few big bags of dried beans are inexpensive *today* and could be lifesavers in a food shortage. Transfer bulk dry goods into **airtight containers with oxygen absorbers** or use food-grade buckets with Gamma

seal lids.^{21 22} This keeps pests and moisture out and dramatically extends shelf life. For example, white rice, if kept dry and sealed, can last 25+ years. Pasta will last many years as well when protected. If you're storing flour, consider also buying whole grains (wheat berries, etc.) and a small grinder – whole grains store longer than flour (which can go rancid due to the oils). Alternatively, store all-purpose flour in airtight bins and rotate it; you can even freeze flour for long-term storage to prevent bugs. **Urban preppers** can use large Mylar bags inside totes or buckets to squirrel away rice and beans under the bed or in a closet. **Rural preppers** might have space for a dedicated pantry or even a root cellar for dry goods. Don't forget seasonings (salt, bouillon, spices) to actually make those staples palatable. By having **a healthy supply of grains and beans now**, you ensure that even if fresh food is scarce, you can cook hearty, sustaining meals. And since these items are cheap now, you're hedging against price spikes and shortages. The next time you see news of a looming crisis, you won't be in the stampede fighting over the last 5-pound bag of rice – you'll already be set.



8. Meat and Protein Sources – Preserve It or Raise It (Before It's Gone)

Bought Too Late:

When people panic-buy food, **meat is often one of the first sections to empty out**. Fresh beef, chicken, pork – they all disappear as families stash them in freezers. But if power goes out, that fresh meat spoils quickly. In past emergencies, frozen meat sold out and then tragically went bad during long blackouts. Many preppers also realize too late that protein is crucial and harder to replace than, say, carbs. If you haven't secured some reliable protein sources beforehand, you might find only empty coolers at the store.

Grab Now Instead:

[Plan your protein supply now using multiple strategies.](#) If you have a freezer, take advantage of normal times to fill it with meat *on sale*. **Freeze small portions in vacuum-sealed bags** or well-wrapped packages – they'll last longer and thaw faster for cooking. Keep a cooler and know how to can or jerky meat as a backup if you suspect a long power outage (canning meat or making jerky are old-school skills that turn fresh meat into shelf-stable form). [Stock up on canned meats too: tuna, canned chicken, Spam, corned beef hash](#) – they might not be gourmet, but they are protein-rich and last years.²³ For example, a flat of canned tuna and salmon can provide essential omega-3s and protein when fresh fish isn't an option. **Jerky and cured sausages** are also great long-lasting protein snacks. If you're serious and have the means, consider **livestock or backyard animals**. Rural preppers often raise chickens or rabbits – chickens for eggs (and meat) or rabbits/quail as a renewable meat source that doesn't require

much space.²⁴ Urban dwellers might not manage livestock, but even they can benefit from things like sprouting lentils or beans for protein or keeping protein powder on hand. Also remember non-meat proteins: beans (dried or canned), peanut butter, lentils, and nuts are valuable protein sources that store well and don't rely on refrigeration. The key is to not be caught protein-poor. If you plan ahead, you'll have the strength to get through an emergency on more than just crackers and candy.



9. Over-the-Counter Medicines – Stock a Mini Pharmacy

Bought Too Late:

When a health crisis or disaster hits, **basic medicines vanish from the shelves**. Pain relievers (acetaminophen, ibuprofen), fever reducers, cold and flu meds, antihistamines, anti-diarrheals – all these can become *worth their weight in gold*. We saw it happen during COVID-19 surges: people bought out Tylenol, cough syrup, and even vitamins. In any emergency, pharmacies are swamped or closed, and **OTC meds “vanish in**

every health crisis". If you wait until you or a family member is sick or injured amid a disaster, you may find the medicine aisle picked clean.²⁵

Grab Now Instead:

Build an OTC medicine stockpile now, when supplies are plentiful. You don't have to spend a fortune all at once. Adopt the habit of buying **one extra box or bottle** of commonly used meds each time you shop.²⁶ Focus on the essentials: pain relievers (both acetaminophen and ibuprofen, since they serve different purposes), aspirin (good to have for heart attacks as well), cold medicine, cough drops, antihistamines for allergies, anti-diarrheal pills (very important if water or food issues cause stomach illness), anti-acid or indigestion meds, and any vitamins or supplements you deem important. Don't forget things like electrolyte packets (to rehydrate if someone is ill) and basic first-aid ointments (antibiotic cream) – we'll cover first aid gear next, but it overlaps with meds. **Organize your medicine kit** by category and note expiration dates.²⁶ Store them in a cool, dry place. Many meds remain effective for a while past expiration, but potency can drop, so rotate and use what you stock. For liquid medicines, pay extra attention to shelf life and consider focusing more on pills (which generally store longer and tolerate temperature swings better). Both urban and rural preppers should think about scenarios like a winter flu when roads are closed, or a pandemic lockdown – you want to have **fever reducers and cough medicine on hand** to treat your family at home. By preparing a personal "pharmacy" now, you'll avoid the dangerous situation of being sick *and* unable to find medicine. In a crisis, the last thing you want is to roam from store to store looking for something as common as ibuprofen. Stock it now and rest easy knowing you can handle minor illnesses and injuries that come your way.



10. Prescription Medications – Secure an Emergency Supply

Bought Too Late:

One of the scariest scenarios is running out of critical **prescription medications** during a crisis. Whether it's insulin, blood pressure meds, asthma inhalers, or any daily prescription – in normal times, you refill just on schedule. But if a disaster closes pharmacies or supply lines, you could be out of meds in days. Unfortunately, many people realize this *too late*. Pharmacies get overrun and **it becomes difficult to find or refill prescriptions in emergencies.**²⁷ During hurricanes or evacuations, those who didn't plan ahead have had to ration pills or go without, risking their health.

Grab Now Instead:

[Aim to create a buffer supply of your essential prescriptions.](#)

This can be challenging due to insurance refill limits, but talk to your doctor and explain you're preparing for emergencies. Often, you can get a **90-day prescription** instead

of 30-day.²⁸ Many insurers allow a one-time emergency refill or vacation override – use these to build up an extra month or two of meds that you can keep in reserve. Rotate your stock so that this emergency supply stays within date (use the oldest meds and replace with new when you refill). Store prescriptions in a **cool, dark, dry place** (heat and moisture can degrade meds).²⁹ If refrigeration is required (like insulin), think about backup power for your fridge or a portable cooler with ice packs during outages. For life-critical meds, consult your doctor about **any safe alternatives or adjustments** if you ever had to stretch doses – not something you want to do, but good to discuss ahead of time. Another tactic: if you physically go to your doctor, ask for **samples** (doctors often have sample packs of meds from pharmaceutical reps; these can become part of your emergency stash). **Never wait until you're on your last pill to refill** – in a disaster, that approach could be fatal. Rural preppers far from pharmacies might already do this, but urban folks should, too, because city pharmacies can be stripped bare in a crisis. And if you rely on mail-order pharmacy, keep track of shipping times – a disaster may delay mail. In short, treat prescription meds as *top priority items* to secure in advance. Your life or well-being could depend on not running out. Plan now, and you won't have to gamble on finding a refill when the world's upside down.



11. First Aid Supplies – Prepare to Patch Up Injuries

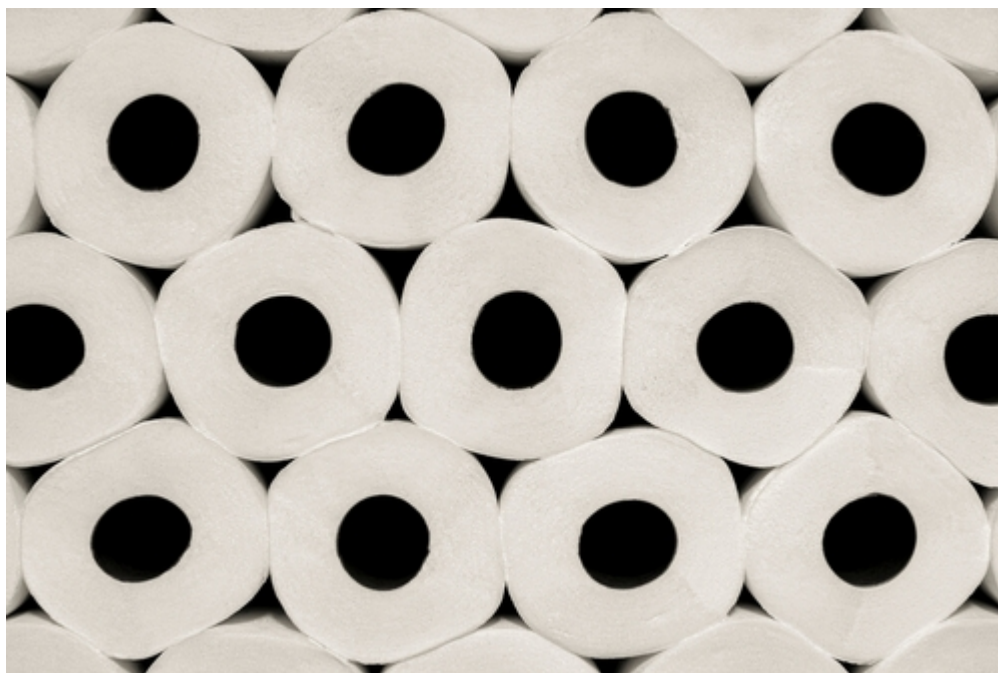
Bought Too Late:

First aid kits and medical supplies often get overlooked – until someone is bleeding or hurt in a crisis. Then, suddenly, everyone wants bandages, disinfectant, and gloves. After major disasters, stores run low on things like gauze, medical tape, peroxide, and other first aid basics as people belatedly assemble kits. If you don't already have these items, trying to buy them amidst an emergency (or while authorities are advising you to stay indoors) is not ideal. An injury in a disaster is double trouble if you have no supplies to treat it on the spot.

Grab Now Instead:

[Build a comprehensive first aid kit now, and learn how to use it.](#) At minimum, have plenty of **bandages** (of all sizes), sterile **gauze pads**, adhesive tape, and elastic bandages for sprains. Stock **antiseptics**: alcohol wipes, povidone-iodine,

and antibiotic ointment to clean and protect wounds. Include **pain relievers** and any OTC meds (from item #9) in your kit. Add tools: tweezers (for splinters or ticks), sharp scissors or trauma shears (to cut clothing or gauze), a digital thermometer, and disposable **gloves** to keep things sanitary. A good first aid manual or printed cheat sheets are invaluable – in a crisis your mind might be racing, so instructions help. If someone in your family has specific needs (e.g. an EpiPen for allergies), make sure that's in the kit and not expired. For **urban preppers**, space is limited, but even a small kit in a pouch can hold a lot of lifesaving gear – stash it in your apartment and maybe a smaller version in your bag. **Rural preppers** might be far from medical help, so consider extra items like a tourniquet, splint materials, and a greater quantity of supplies. Also consider **“bleed control” items** like hemostatic gauze or tourniquets if you're preparing for severe injuries (these have saved lives in accidents and disasters). Don't forget personal items: if you wear glasses, keep an old spare pair; if you have dentures or hearing aids, have backup batteries or supplies. And practice some basic first aid skills (many resources available, even local Red Cross classes). By having a well-stocked first aid kit ready, you can treat injuries at home and avoid a potentially overwhelmed emergency room. It's often said that in a disaster, *“the life you save may be your own (or a loved one's)”* – so get those bandages and learn how to stop the bleed *now*, not when it's too late.



12. Toilet Paper – Bulk Buy (and Alternatives) Before the Rush

Bought Too Late:

We all remember the **Great Toilet Paper Shortage** at the start of the pandemic. Toilet paper is bulky, essential, and something no one wants to run out of, so it becomes a prime target for panic-buying. In fact, **toilet paper is often the very first thing to go in an emergency.**³⁰ Whether it's a hurricane forecast or a lockdown announcement, stores get cleared of TP in hours. If you're late to the game, you'll be staring at empty shelves (and maybe kicking yourself). Sure, TP isn't *truly* lifesaving like water or medicine, but it greatly affects comfort and sanitation. As any prepper knows, it's better to have it than be desperately seeking it (people have done some awkward things when TP was unavailable).

Grab Now Instead:

Stock up on toilet paper in advance, in reasonable bulk. This doesn't mean hoard 10 years' worth; it means always keep a

healthy surplus so you can outlast disruptions. Buy in bulk packs when it's on sale and store the extra in a dry place (plastic bins or bags can protect it from moisture and pests). Figure out your household's usage and aim to have at least a few months' supply set aside. **Rotate your stash** (use the older packs first and replace with new) to avoid the TP degrading in storage – although properly kept, TP lasts basically forever. Critically, also **prepare alternatives**. If you truly run out, you'll need a plan B for your behind. One prepper tip is to install a **bidet attachment** on your toilet – this was a game changer for many during the 2020 TP crisis. A simple \$30 bidet sprayer can dramatically cut TP use by cleaning with water. Also consider **reusable cloth wipes** (often called “family cloth”): pieces of clean cloth that can be washed, sanitized, and reused – not everyone's first choice, but in an emergency it beats nothing.^{31 32} Keep a bucket or sealable bin to safely soak used cloths if you go that route. For short-term emergencies, even napkins, paper towels, or tissues (if you have them) can substitute – just don't flush those, dispose of them properly. For **urban folks** in apartments, storage is tight, but you can cram TP rolls into all sorts of nooks (top shelves, under beds). **Rural folks** with land might even store a year's worth in the garage. However you do it, ensure you won't be the person caught in a crisis without this creature comfort. Few things cause household panic like the last roll disappearing – solve that now by stockpiling and strategizing alternatives.



13. Cleaning Supplies and Bleach – Disinfectants Don't Last on Shelves

Bought Too Late:

A health emergency hits (say a virus outbreak) or water is contaminated, and suddenly **bleach, disinfectant wipes, and cleaning sprays** are worth their weight in gold. We saw it in 2020: Lysol, Clorox wipes, hand sanitizer – all gone overnight. **Bleach and other disinfectants become hot commodities during outbreaks.**³⁴ People also grab cleaning supplies in storms (bleach to purify water or clean flood mess) and general emergencies (nobody wants sickness on top of crisis). If you try to purchase these after panic sets in, you'll face either empty shelves or strict limits (remember "2 per customer" signs?) and possibly steep prices.

Grab Now Instead:

[Store a cache of key cleaning and sanitation supplies before anything happens.](#) Top of the list is **unscented household bleach** – it's cheap and incredibly versatile (for disinfecting surfaces *and* purifying water in proper dilution). A gallon or

two stored away (check expiration, as bleach loses potency in about a year) is smart. Alternatively, **pool shock (calcium hypochlorite)** can be stored as a powder and used to make bleach solution on demand – a small packet can treat thousands of gallons of water (advanced prepper trick, but worth researching if you're serious). Stock up on **disinfectant wipes or sprays** for easy sanitation, and **hand sanitizer** (with at least 60% alcohol) for when soap and water aren't readily available. If commercial products become unavailable, be ready to **make DIY disinfectant**: plain bleach diluted 1:10 with water is a hospital-grade disinfectant; or use alcohol (70% isopropyl) in a spray bottle. White vinegar is also handy for general cleaning (not a hospital-level disinfectant on its own, but useful for many tasks). The **Imperfectly Happy** blog recommends storing concentrated cleaners and using vinegar or alcohol to mix your own solution if needed.³⁴ Also consider hygiene items like garbage bags (for waste), dish soap, laundry detergent (get a few extra bottles or pods). In a prolonged grid-down, **sanitation is crucial** to prevent disease. For both urban and rural preppers, garbage pickup might stop, or water treatment might falter – cleaning supplies help you safely manage waste and keep living areas sanitary. If you have infants in the house, include extra **baby-safe cleaners** and plenty of diapers/wipes (see next item). By having these supplies on hand, you won't be desperately searching for bleach or alcohol when everyone else is, and you can keep your environment clean and disease-free when it matters most.



14. Toiletries and Feminine Hygiene – Personal Care for the Long Haul

Bought Too Late:

In any extended crisis, people quickly realize they're running out of everyday personal care items. **Toiletries like soap, shampoo, toothpaste, deodorant, and feminine hygiene products** (pads, tampons) are not immediately life-saving, but try going a week without them – it gets uncomfortable fast. During panic buying, these items are **swept off shelves quickly**.³⁵ We've seen tampon shortages even in normal times due to supply issues – in a disaster, it's even worse. If you have a baby, diapers and wipes disappear in a flash (more on that below). Essentially, anything to do with hygiene tends to go early because people realize there might be shortages and they do *not* want to be caught without. If you attempt to buy these after everyone else has started stocking up, you may find only the least popular or super expensive brands left.

Grab Now Instead:

Stock up on personal hygiene essentials now, when you have the luxury of choice and sales. Think in categories: dental care (toothpaste, spare toothbrushes, floss), bathing (bars of soap store well, and/body wash, plus extra bottles of shampoo), and grooming (razors, shaving cream if needed). Don't forget **toilet paper** (covered above) and **feminine products**: calculate how many your household uses in a month and aim to have several months' worth stored. These items are compact – you can fill a plastic bin with enough bars of soap, toothpaste tubes, and tampons to last a year and tuck it in a closet. **Buy in bulk or use coupons** when possible to save money.³⁶ Also consider sustainable alternatives: menstrual cups or reusable cloth pads can back up or replace disposable feminine products (useful knowledge if stores are empty). For soap, having some bottles of plain unscented bleach-free **hand soap** or castile soap is great (castile soap can multi-task for dishes, laundry, even shampoo in a pinch). **Urban preppers** might focus on items that manage garbage and pests too – like extra trash bags, disinfectant (from item #13), and maybe pest control (flies and rats can become a problem if sanitation breaks down). **Rural preppers** often have well water – ensure you have extra **soap for laundry** since you can't just buy more clothes easily in a disaster; stock detergent or learn to make your own. Store hygiene items in airtight bins if your area is humid (to prevent them from degrading). By anticipating your family's needs – from daily showers to that time of the month – you'll maintain morale and health. Staying clean isn't just a luxury; it prevents illness and lifts spirits when everything else is chaotic. So don't just prep beans and bullets – **prep the shampoo and ChapStick too!** You'll be glad you did.



15. Baby and Pet Supplies – Don't Forget Your Little Ones (Furry or Otherwise)

Bought Too Late:

It's heartbreaking but common: people stock up for themselves and overlook **babies and pets**. Only when a crisis is underway do they realize Junior has just a day's worth of formula left, or Fido's bag of kibble is almost empty. In emergencies, **baby essentials (formula, diapers, wipes) vanish fast** because they are absolutely non-negotiable.³⁷ Likewise, pet food and supplies often run out – pets are often *forgotten* in emergency prep until their owners see shelves empty of pet food.³⁸ During COVID, for example, pet food shortages caught many off guard. If you're scrambling to find specific formula or pet medication during a disaster, you could be out of luck when stores are closed or sold out.

Grab Now Instead:

[Stockpile for your dependents, human and animal, now.](#) If you have an **infant**, ensure you have a sizable supply of **formula** (if used) and **baby food**. Aim for at least a couple weeks' worth at all times.³⁹ Formula is one thing you can't easily jury-rig a substitute for – babies have specific nutritional needs. If mom is nursing, think about what she might need (extra calories for mom, or a backup plan if nursing is interrupted). **Diapers** are another priority: buy in bulk and keep an extra pack or two in the next sizes up as well (babies grow!). Don't forget **wipes, rash cream, and any medications** (baby Tylenol, etc.). Rotate diapers and formula as needed so they don't expire or the baby outgrows them – you can donate extras if your baby moves past a stage. For **pets**, store at least **two weeks (preferably a month or more) of pet food**.⁴⁰ Dry kibble can be stored in airtight bins to keep it fresh; canned pet food lasts long on its own. If your pet is on any medications or special diet, make sure to have those on hand. Have extra **cat litter** for cats, and poop bags for dogs to manage waste. A pet first aid kit is wise too. Importantly, have a plan for water for your pets (they drink too!) – include them in your one-gallon-per-person allotment, roughly **one ounce of water per pound of pet per day** as a rule of thumb. **Urban pet owners** in apartments should think about how to take pets out if there's chaos – maybe potty pads for dogs if going outside is unsafe. **Rural pet owners** might have livestock – that's a whole other level of prep (stock feed, hay, etc. well ahead of time). Also consider comfort items: a stressed baby or pet is calmed by the familiar, so having their regular food, a pacifier, or a favorite toy during upheaval can help. Ultimately, **their survival and comfort depend on you**. So prep for them with the same urgency you prep for yourself. You don't want to be in a situation where you have food but your baby doesn't, or you're eating canned stew while your dog looks at you hungry. Take care of the little

and furry members of your household by **grabbing their essentials now**, not later.



16. Emergency Communication (Radios) – Don't Count on Cell Networks

Bought Too Late:

When the power grid fails or a disaster knocks out infrastructure, **modern communication networks (cell service, internet)** can go down hard. Many people realized in recent hurricanes and wildfires that they had no way to get information once the cell towers were out and Wi-Fi was off. At that moment, they all wanted **battery-powered radios**, walkie-talkies, or NOAA weather radios – and of course, those were sold out or unavailable. Communications gear isn't usually top-of-mind until **people are cut off and panic hits**. If you wait until after the disaster to think about a radio, you'll be literally and figuratively in the dark, possibly unable to call for help or receive critical news.

Grab Now Instead:

Equip yourself with reliable emergency communications now.

Every household should have at least one **battery-powered or hand-crank emergency radio** that can receive AM/FM and NOAA weather bands.⁴¹ These radios are lifelines – they let you hear government alerts, news, and instructions when other channels are dead. There are inexpensive models that also include solar charging and USB ports. Get one and keep it in an easily accessible spot (and test it!). As one disaster survivor put it, *“everyone should have a battery or self-powered portable radio in their home”*⁴² – it’s true. Next, consider **two-way communication**: a pair of FRS/GMRS walkie-talkies for family use if you’re separated (great for both urban neighborhoods and rural properties). If you’re more tech-savvy, you might pursue a **ham radio license** and a handheld ham radio – during many crises, amateur radio operators provide essential comms when all else fails. (In fact, ham radio was credited with saving lives when Hurricane Helene hit one community, acting as the only link out.)⁴³ For simpler options, even those little long-range walkie-talkies you can buy at Walmart can let you communicate with neighbors or group members if cell phones die. Also ensure you have **backup power** (batteries or solar charger) for these devices. If you live in a city high-rise, a radio might be your only source of outside info if the grid’s down; if you’re rural, you might be cut off for days and a radio could let you call in needs or get weather updates. Don’t neglect **simple things** like an old-fashioned corded phone if you have landline service (landlines sometimes work when power is out, since they’re powered by the phone line itself – useful if cell phones fail). In summary, make a communications plan now: know how you’d get info and contact help if phones and internet were unavailable. Acquire the devices and knowledge beforehand. The peace of mind from hearing a reassuring voice on the radio in a disaster is huge – and it’s only possible if you **prepare your comms gear in advance**.



17. Home Defense (Firearms and Ammo) – Arm and Train Before Trouble Starts

Bought Too Late:

When society feels unstable – say during riots, economic collapse fears, or talk of new gun restrictions – there's always a **massive surge in firearm and ammunition sales**. People who never owned a gun suddenly want one for protection. The result? Gun stores get overrun, popular models sell out, and ammunition of common calibers becomes scarce or exorbitantly priced. We saw this in 2020: record gun purchases created an **ammo shortage across the United States**⁴⁴, affecting even law enforcement supplies. If you decide you need a weapon *after* threats are already present, you may face waiting periods, background check delays, or simply empty shelves. In an actual breakdown of order (looting, etc.), it will definitely be too late to arm yourself **if you haven't already**.

Grab Now Instead:

Address your home and personal defense needs now, well ahead of any crisis. If you are legally able and so inclined, consider purchasing a **firearm (or firearms) and sufficient ammunition** *before* you ever need to use them. Research what suits your situation – a shotgun or handgun for home defense, perhaps a rifle if you need to hunt for food. *Train and practice* with it regularly so you're comfortable and safe in its use. Owning a gun without training is not much better than not having one at all. **Stock up on ammo gradually** when it's available and affordable; ammo keeps for a long time if stored dry and cool. Don't wait for headlines of unrest to try and buy 9mm rounds – they'll be gone. Even aside from extreme events, having a means of self-defense is part of preparedness. However, firearms aren't the only means: **pepper spray, bear spray, tasers, or a good baton** can be effective self-defense tools, especially in urban settings where gun ownership may be restricted or where a non-lethal option is preferred. Acquire and learn to use these now (pepper spray is legal in most places and can deter both two- and four-legged threats). Also consider your **home security**: reinforce doors, have strong locks, maybe a security system or at least a loud battery-powered alarm. Those physical preparations can deter trouble without a fight. For rural preppers, defense might also include protecting livestock from predators – a rifle can serve double duty for that. The overarching point is **don't count on last-minute measures for security**. If things have gotten so bad you suddenly want a gun, it's likely too late to easily get one. Make that decision in calm times and prepare accordingly. Likewise, join self-defense classes or community watch groups *before* you actually need those skills. In a crisis, law enforcement could be stretched thin – you are your own first responder. So fortify your homestead, arm yourself within the bounds of the law, and you won't be left defenseless if crime or chaos spikes when SHTF.



18. Off-Grid Cooking and Heat – Stoves, Fuel, and Warmth When Power Fails

Bought Too Late:

When the electricity and natural gas go out, suddenly **millions of people cannot cook or heat their homes**. In these moments, everyone scrambles for **camp stoves, propane, charcoal, firewood, and portable heaters**. Predictably, those items become scarce quickly. During winter storms, stores sell out of propane cylinders and space heaters in mere hours. After hurricanes, **grills and camping stoves become hot commodities**, as folks still need to boil water or cook with no power.⁴⁵ If you wait until you're shivering or eating cold beans out of a can, you might find there's no stove or fuel left to buy.

Grab Now Instead:

[Set yourself up with alternative cooking and heating methods now.](#) For cooking, one of the simplest is a **camping stove** that

runs on propane or butane. These small stoves (like those single-burner butane stoves or the classic Coleman 2-burner propane stove) are affordable and easy to use – perfect for apartment balconies or backyards in an emergency. **Store extra fuel canisters** safely – those little 1 lb propane bottles or butane cans; they last for years if not leaking. If you have a barbecue grill, make sure you always have a spare propane tank or a stock of charcoal. Keep **multiple lighters and waterproof matches** on hand too.⁴⁵ A simple **rocket stove** (which you can even DIY from bricks or cans) is a great backup that burns twigs or wood very efficiently – useful for rural folks who have wood around, or even urbanites who could scavenge broken furniture for fuel. For heating, if you're in a cold climate, consider a **Mr. Buddy indoor-safe propane heater** or similar – but *buy it before* the blizzard, because they routinely sell out when a cold snap hits. And of course, have the fuel for it (propane cylinders, kerosene for kerosene heaters, etc.) stored safely. **Never rely on open flames indoors without proper ventilation** (carbon monoxide is deadly) – so things like unvented kerosene heaters or charcoal grills **must NOT be used indoors**. If you have a wood fireplace or stove, ensure you have a good stockpile of **firewood** well ahead of winter (and properly dried). **Urban dwellers** might not be able to install wood stoves, but they can still have warm clothing, quality sleeping bags, and emergency Mylar blankets to stay warm if heat is out. In both city and country, a **tent set up indoors** can trap body heat and keep you warmer at night if you have no other heat. Think creatively: during the 2021 Texas freeze, some people safely ran portable propane camp stoves for short periods to boil water and cook – those who had them fared much better. So, buy that camp stove and heater now, not when the shelves are bare. Store fuels now, not when trucks stop delivering. And test your gear! Cook a meal on your camp stove or fire pit *before* you need to rely on it. By prepping alternative cooking and heating solutions, you ensure that even if the grid goes down, you can still have a warm meal and

a warm place to sleep. That kind of self-reliance can literally be life-saving in extreme conditions.



19. Cash and Barter Items – Have Currency When ATMs Go Down

Bought Too Late:

In our digital age, many people don't keep much cash on hand. But when power outages or cyber failures hit, **ATMs stop working and credit card machines go offline**. Suddenly, only cash is accepted for the few stores or gas stations that might be open. Those without cash find themselves unable to buy necessities. We've seen this during blackouts and after severe storms – **people lining up at dead ATMs or banks**, which of course can't help until systems are back. By the time most realize they need physical cash, it's too late (banks closed, ATMs empty). Similarly, in a prolonged crisis or economic breakdown, certain **barter items** become extremely valuable – think cigarettes, alcohol, and coffee for example. These comfort goods disappear early (even non-users grab them, anticipating trading).⁴⁶ If you realize after a crisis that a

bottle of whiskey could get you batteries or that your neighbor would trade fresh eggs for coffee, well, you either have those items or you don't – you can't easily "buy" them late in the game.

Grab Now Instead:

Prepare a financial and barter cushion before any emergency.

Always keep a reserve of **cash in small bills** in a safe, accessible place. How much depends on your means, but even \$100-\$200 stashed can buy food or gas in a pinch. Small bills (\$1s, \$5s, \$10s) are important because in a scenario where change systems are down, a \$20 might not get you change. Think of cash for specific needs: fuel, groceries, perhaps a night in a motel out of town – what would you need if cards stopped working for a week? Have that on hand. Next, consider **precious metals or portable valuables** if you're preparing for severe economic trouble – a few silver coins or a bit of gold could be a hedge (recognize that not every crisis involves a currency collapse, but it's classic prepper insurance). More practically, **stockpile some high-demand goods** purely for barter. **Alcohol and tobacco** are prime examples: even if you don't drink or smoke, bottles of whiskey and packs of cigarettes could be top trading items when stressed populations seek a little comfort.⁴⁶ They also have long shelf lives. Other barter items include: coffee (an unopened jar of instant coffee or some vacuum-packed ground coffee), tea, sugar, chocolate, ammo (if you're comfortable trading that), first aid supplies, hygiene items like extra toothpaste or soap, and fuel canisters. Basically, think of cheap items now that would be scarce and desired in crisis. **Rural preppers** might also consider bartering their excess (like eggs, garden produce, firewood) but that's situational. **Urban preppers** may find barter useful if cash loses value or if they have skills to trade (keep some tools or repair kits if you plan to barter labor). The key is, by having **cash and goods ready**, you maintain the ability to obtain what you need when normal

commerce is disrupted. You won't be among the frantic crowds at ATMs (which might not even work); instead, you'll calmly pull out the emergency envelope of cash. And if it's a long slog and money loses meaning, you have tangible items to trade for things money can't buy at that moment. This kind of foresight can keep you economically resilient when others are helpless.



20. The Bug-Out Bag – Pack Your Go-Bag Before You Need to Flee

Bought Too Late:

When authorities issue an evacuation order – say a wildfire is 5 miles out or a chemical spill is heading your way – people have *minutes* to leave. Too often, folks start throwing random supplies into a suitcase at the last second, or they rush to Walmart (if it's even open) to grab things they suddenly realize they need. This is how critical items get forgotten. We've all seen footage of highways jammed with evacuees; imagine realizing you didn't bring any food, or spare batteries, or even essential documents. At that point, it's

too late to assemble a proper emergency kit. Some people even attempt to buy pre-made “survival kits” online after a disaster hits, hoping it arrives in time – not a good plan. **A bug-out bag that isn’t ready to go when you are, is no help at all.**

Grab Now Instead:

[Assemble your bug-out bag \(Go-Bag\) now, and keep it ready.](#) A bug-out bag is a portable kit with everything you need to survive for at least 72 hours when you’re on the move. You should tailor it to your needs, but basics include: water (e.g. a few water pouches or a filter like a LifeStraw), non-perishable high-energy food (energy bars, trail mix, MREs), a first aid kit, a change of clothes and sturdy footwear, a blanket or bivy sack, a fire-starting method (lighter, matches), flashlight and extra batteries, a multitool, cash, copies of important documents (IDs, insurance) in a waterproof pouch, and any critical personal items (like medications, an extra pair of glasses, etc.). Pack these in a comfortable backpack **now**, not later. Keep the bag in an easy-to-grab spot (front closet, under your bed). If you have family, each member should have a bag or you should have a larger bag with communal supplies and smaller ones for personal items. Don’t forget supplies for pets in your evacuation kit (food, leash, collapsible bowl). **Urban residents** should plan routes and transport for evacuation – your bug-out bag might include a map of the city and a USB power bank for your phone. **Rural residents** might need to bug out if wildfire or flooding threatens; include maps of back roads in case main routes are jammed. Also have seasonal adjustments – in winter, add hand warmers and extra jackets; in summer, sunscreen and bug spray. The crucial part is to **pack all this in advance**. When the knock comes on the door saying “you have 5 minutes to leave,” you won’t be paralyzed or scrambling. You’ll grab your go-bag (and maybe a pre-packed bin of irreplaceable keepsakes you prepared) and get out safely. Revisit and update your bug-out

bag every few months or at least annually – swap out expired food, clothes that no longer fit kids, etc. Conduct family drills if possible, treating it like a game (“We have 10 minutes to evacuate – what do we do?”). This will reveal if your plans need tweaking. By having a go-bag ready, you’ve essentially **bought insurance against panic** – you won’t need to dash to the store or tear apart your house for supplies under duress. It’s all there, in the bag, because smart prepper you *thought ahead*.

**NEW AMAZING SYSTEM
HARVESTS 10-GALLONS
OF CLEAN WATER
IN 24 HOURS**

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Conclusion

Disasters don’t wait for convenient timing – and they certainly won’t wait for you to finish a last-minute shopping trip. The hard truth is, if **you wait until “the next wave” of panic to prepare, you’ve waited too long.**⁴⁷ The good news? By identifying these commonly “too-late” items now, you can take action *today*. Start building your stockpile item by item, week by week. Prioritize water, food, medicine, and other life-sustainers, but don’t neglect comfort and morale boosters. **Test your gear** (fire up that generator or camp stove on a calm afternoon) and rotate your supplies to keep them fresh. Get your family involved – make it a mission, not a chore. If you live in an urban area, focus on clever storage and portability; if you’re rural, take advantage of space to become self-sufficient.

Remember, **preparedness is the antidote to panic**. When the next crisis comes – and it will, whether big or small – you won't be the one racing through picked-over aisles or sitting in the dark worrying. You'll be ready, your family will be fed and safe, and you'll have the tools to handle whatever happens. As the saying goes, *"The more you sweat in peace, the less you bleed in war."* In preparedness terms: the more you **prep before a disaster, the less you'll suffer during one.**⁴⁷ So take this as your call to action: [grab your list and start prepping these items now.](#) Every can of food, every filled water jug, every skill learned is an investment in your resilience. Build your stockpile, secure your home, and have a plan – do it before the storm clouds are on the horizon. You'll thank yourself later when you sail through the next emergency with confidence, while others wish they had acted sooner.⁴⁷ The best time to get prepared was yesterday; the second best time is today!

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When disaster looms – be it a sudden storm, pandemic lockdown, or grid failure – people rush out in a frenzy to snap up supplies. If you’ve ever arrived even a day late, you know the scene: **empty shelves, long lines, and quiet panic.**¹ It doesn’t take much for crucial goods to vanish overnight.² The problem is, many **preppers and the unprepared alike** realize the need for certain items only *after* the crisis hits, when it’s already too late. We saw this during the pandemic (remember the great toilet paper shortage?) and before countless hurricanes and blackouts. By then, you’re left with slim pickings and regret.



**THE GOD-GIVEN WAY
TO PULL 10-GALLONS
OF CLEAN WATER FROM
AIR IN 24 HOURS**

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The key to survival is **acting before the emergency**, not during. In this article, we’ll walk through **20 items that are often bought far too late** – and more importantly, **what smarter alternatives you should stock up on now instead**. Each item comes with urgent, practical advice to help you **stay ahead of**

the panic. Whether you live in a city apartment or on a rural homestead, these tips will cover how to prepare *today* so you're not stuck wishing you had later. Let's dive in and ensure that the next time disaster is on the horizon, you'll be calm at home while others fight over the last bottle of water.



1. Bottled Water – Store Water and Purification Systems Now

Bought Too Late:

Bottled water is usually the **first thing to disappear in any emergency**. The moment there's news of a hurricane or contamination, people empty store shelves of water jugs.³ If you wait until the last minute, you'll find nothing but a "Sold Out" sign – or hugely inflated prices.

Grab Now Instead:

[Secure a water supply before crisis hits.](#) Start by storing **at least one gallon per person per day** for 3–7 days (more if you

have space).⁴ You can fill durable containers or buy water bricks and keep them in a cool, dark place. For urban preppers tight on space, even a few flat water storage bags under the bed are better than nothing. Next, invest in a **reliable water purification method**. Don't count on being able to buy bottled water later – **get a quality gravity-fed filter or portable purifier now** (brands like LifeStraw or Berkey are popular).⁵ Water purification tablets and unscented bleach (for treating water) are cheap to stockpile and invaluable if your stored water runs low. Rural preppers with a well should have a manual pump or generator backup to draw water when the grid's down. Urban dwellers should scope out alternate water sources (nearby ponds, public pools, etc.) *beforehand* and have the means to filter that water. The bottom line: **water is life** – don't rely on frantic last-minute runs. Store it, filter it, and you won't go thirsty when taps run dry.



2. Flashlights and Batteries – Rechargeables and Solar Lighting

Bought Too Late:

As soon as the power goes out, **flashlights and batteries fly off store shelves**. Every blackout or hurricane warning sees people panic-buying D-cells and cheap flashlights.⁶ The unprepared are left in the dark or resorting to unsafe candles. If you wait until lights out, you'll be competing for whatever dim flashlight remains.

Grab Now Instead:

Light up your life *before* an emergency. **Stock up on quality LED lighting now**. Good options are LED flashlights, headlamps (for hands-free tasks), and lanterns for area lighting. Get a **stash of batteries** – and prioritize **rechargeable batteries with a solar charger**.⁷ A small solar panel or hand-crank charger can keep your lights (and critical electronics) running indefinitely, a huge advantage for both urban apartments and off-grid cabins. **Place flashlights in key rooms** of your home now, so you're never stumbling around.⁸ Also, consider motion-sensor lights or solar garden lamps that charge by day and can be brought indoors at night. Don't forget to test your gear regularly – a flashlight with dead batteries is as useful as a paperweight. By preparing versatile, renewable lighting ahead of time, you won't be left in darkness when the grid fails. (And as a bonus, you'll avoid the fire hazard of candles – which in any case tend to sell out quickly during emergencies.)



3. Gasoline – Safe Fuel Reserves and Alternatives

Bought Too Late:

The moment an evacuation is announced or a major storm approaches, **gas station lines stretch for miles**. Panicked drivers top off their tanks and fill gas cans. In these rushes, stations run dry fast – in one recent hurricane, **17% of Florida gas stations ran out of fuel within a single day of panic-buying.**⁹ If you're trying to buy gasoline at the last minute, you could be out of luck or stuck in hour-long lines (only to find empty pumps).

Grab Now Instead:

Plan your fuel needs in advance. First, never let your vehicle's gas tank fall below half during times of potential crisis. Keeping it topped off gives you a built-in reserve. Next, if you have the property and legal allowance (this is easier rural than in a city), **store some gasoline safely now.** Use proper **fuel containers** and add a stabilizer so gas stays

usable for 12+ months. Rotate your stock periodically. This stash can feed your generator or vehicle when stations are empty. Urban preppers or those without fuel storage space might consider a small **fuel siphon kit** – in dire straits you could extract gasoline from your lawnmower or car for other uses (or from abandoned vehicles, if it ever came to that). Additionally, invest in **fuel alternatives**: a dual-fuel generator (propane/gasoline) or a solar power station means you're not solely reliant on gas. **Solar generators** (basically big battery packs charged by solar panels) have become a viable option – no fuel needed. If you must evacuate by car, having extra gas cans pre-filled can be a lifesaver on jammed highways. The lesson: when everyone else is scrambling for a last drop of fuel, you'll be ready to roll because you secured your supply *ahead of time*.



4. Generators – Backup Power Before

the Storm

Bought Too Late:

Portable generators become hot-ticket items the moment a severe storm or blackout is forecast. Walk into any hardware store right after a big power outage and you'll see empty spots where generators used to be. During the Texas freeze and other disasters, there were *mad rushes* for generators and even propane heaters, with retailers selling out as soon as new shipments arrived.^{10 11} If you wait for the lights to go out or the winter cold to set in, finding a generator (at a reasonable price) will be near impossible.

Grab Now Instead:

Invest in reliable backup power now, during the calm. If you own a home (especially in rural areas prone to outages), consider installing a generator *before* you need it. Even a smaller portable generator can keep your fridge, critical appliances, or medical devices running. Look for dual-fuel models if possible – they offer flexibility during fuel shortages. **Urban prepper?** You might not be able to run a loud gas generator in an apartment, so look into a **solar-powered generator (power station)**. These high-capacity battery banks, paired with solar panels, can silently power small devices and some appliances without fumes – perfect for indoor use. At a minimum, have a **power inverter** that can draw from your car's battery to run electronics in a pinch. Whatever solution fits your situation, acquire it now and learn to use it safely. *Test run your generator* occasionally (and keep fuel for it, see item #3) so you're confident it works. Backup power is one of those things that brings immense peace of mind: when the whole neighborhood is dark, you won't be the one desperately searching for a generator – you'll be the one who planned ahead and kept the lights on.



5. Bread, Milk and Eggs – Shelf-Stable Foods and DIY Alternatives

Bought Too Late:

Whenever a winter storm or crisis is looming, the classic staples of **bread, milk, and eggs** fly off grocery shelves. These perishables are so routinely panic-bought that it's a running joke (people preparing for a storm as if they're planning to live on French toast!). **Bread goes quickly because it's familiar, filling, and perishable¹²**, milk and eggs vanish because they're daily basics that spoil without refrigeration.¹³ If you rush out late to grab these, you'll find empty racks in the bakery aisle and nothing but maybe some powdered milk nobody wanted.

Grab Now Instead:

[Stock up on shelf-stable alternatives and ingredients.](#) Instead of loaves of fresh bread that turn moldy, store **flour, yeast, baking powder, and salt** in your pantry so you can bake your

own bread if needed.¹⁴ Even a simple no-knead bread recipe can produce fresh bread when stores are closed. Keep some **tortillas** or **cracker packs** as they last longer than bread. For milk, buy **shelf-stable options** like **powdered milk** or **UHT milk cartons**.¹⁵ Powdered milk can be reconstituted with water and lasts a long time on the shelf – not the tastiest for drinking, but excellent for cooking or cereals. Canned evaporated milk is another alternative. For eggs, consider **egg substitutes** or **powdered eggs** (yes, they exist and are used for baking or scrambles when fresh eggs aren't available).¹⁶ Another tactic: *freeze what you can*. Milk can be frozen (just don't fill the container to the brim), and you can actually crack eggs and freeze them in ice cube trays for later use.¹⁷ If you have the ability and long-term mindset, raising a few chickens or quail can provide a renewable egg supply (quail are small and even workable in some urban backyards)¹⁸ – but that's a bigger project. At minimum, **don't rely on last-minute grocery runs for these basics**. Have ingredients and durable replacements now, and you'll still have bread and milk for your coffee when everyone else is staring at barren shelves.



6. Canned Goods and Ready-to-Eat Meals – Build a Pantry Now

Bought Too Late:

In the early stages of any disaster, people grab **canned meat, soups, beans, veggies, and instant meals** like their lives depend on it – because in a way, they do. These shelf-stable foods provide quick nutrition and comfort when fresh food is unavailable. Naturally, **canned goods are among the first aisles to be cleaned out** during panic-buying.¹⁹ The same goes for things like cereal, granola bars, and jarred foods – anything that can be eaten with minimal cooking. If you wait until everyone is frantically shopping, you'll be greeted by rows of empty metal shelves where canned goods used to be.

Grab Now Instead:

[Gradually stock a robust emergency pantry in advance.](#) Canned and packaged foods last years and are easy to accumulate a little at a time. Each grocery trip, throw in a few extra cans of your regular staples (beans, tuna, stew, vegetables, fruit – whatever you and your family will eat). This way you build your stockpile **before** a crisis, not during. **Rotate your cans** by expiration date – put newer purchases at the back so you use older ones first.²⁰ Also diversify: include high-calorie ready-to-eat items like peanut butter, canned chili, and energy bars. Think about **meals that require little or no cooking** (since in a disaster you may have limited fuel). Classics like canned soups or pasta meals can be heated over a simple camp stove (see item #18) or even eaten cold if it comes to it. Don't neglect comfort foods entirely – a can of fruit cocktail or some chocolate can boost morale. For longer-term resilience, consider stocking some **freeze-dried meals or MREs** (Meals Ready to Eat), which were also in high demand during recent crises and tend to sell out. The goal is to

create your own “store” at home. In an urban apartment, this might mean filling a closet or under-bed bins with canned food; in a rural home, maybe shelving in a cellar. When disaster strikes, you won't need to race to the supermarket – you'll simply “shop” your pantry, calmly and well-fed.



7. Dry Staples (Rice, Pasta, Flour) – Bulk Up and Preserve Them

Bought Too Late:

Along with canned goods, staples like **rice, beans, pasta, and grains** get snatched up quickly at the first hint of trouble. These basics are cheap, filling, and versatile – which means everyone wants them in an emergency. You've probably seen the picked-over shelves where bags of rice or noodles used to be. Flour and baking supplies also turn scarce once store-bought bread is gone.²¹ If you procrastinate, you could be left without these foundation foods (and they're hard to improvise or substitute).

Grab Now Instead:

Buy dry staples in bulk now, and store them properly for the long haul. A 20-pound bag of rice or a few big bags of dried beans are inexpensive *today* and could be lifesavers in a food shortage. Transfer bulk dry goods into **airtight containers with oxygen absorbers** or use food-grade buckets with Gamma seal lids.^{21 22} This keeps pests and moisture out and dramatically extends shelf life. For example, white rice, if kept dry and sealed, can last 25+ years. Pasta will last many years as well when protected. If you're storing flour, consider also buying whole grains (wheat berries, etc.) and a small grinder – whole grains store longer than flour (which can go rancid due to the oils). Alternatively, store all-purpose flour in airtight bins and rotate it; you can even freeze flour for long-term storage to prevent bugs. **Urban preppers** can use large Mylar bags inside totes or buckets to squirrel away rice and beans under the bed or in a closet. **Rural preppers** might have space for a dedicated pantry or even a root cellar for dry goods. Don't forget seasonings (salt, bouillon, spices) to actually make those staples palatable. By having **a healthy supply of grains and beans now**, you ensure that even if fresh food is scarce, you can cook hearty, sustaining meals. And since these items are cheap now, you're hedging against price spikes and shortages. The next time you see news of a looming crisis, you won't be in the stampede fighting over the last 5-pound bag of rice – you'll already be set.



8. Meat and Protein Sources – Preserve It or Raise It (Before It's Gone)

Bought Too Late:

When people panic-buy food, **meat is often one of the first sections to empty out**. Fresh beef, chicken, pork – they all disappear as families stash them in freezers. But if power goes out, that fresh meat spoils quickly. In past emergencies, frozen meat sold out and then tragically went bad during long blackouts. Many preppers also realize too late that protein is crucial and harder to replace than, say, carbs. If you haven't secured some reliable protein sources beforehand, you might find only empty coolers at the store.

Grab Now Instead:

[Plan your protein supply now using multiple strategies.](#) If you have a freezer, take advantage of normal times to fill it with meat *on sale*. **Freeze small portions in vacuum-sealed bags** or well-wrapped packages – they'll last longer and thaw faster

for cooking. Keep a cooler and know how to can or jerky meat as a backup if you suspect a long power outage (canning meat or making jerky are old-school skills that turn fresh meat into shelf-stable form). [Stock up on canned meats too: tuna, canned chicken, Spam, corned beef hash](#) – they might not be gourmet, but they are protein-rich and last years.²³ For example, a flat of canned tuna and salmon can provide essential omega-3s and protein when fresh fish isn't an option. **Jerky and cured sausages** are also great long-lasting protein snacks. If you're serious and have the means, consider **livestock or backyard animals**. Rural preppers often raise chickens or rabbits – chickens for eggs (and meat) or rabbits/quail as a renewable meat source that doesn't require much space.²⁴ Urban dwellers might not manage livestock, but even they can benefit from things like sprouting lentils or beans for protein or keeping protein powder on hand. Also remember non-meat proteins: beans (dried or canned), peanut butter, lentils, and nuts are valuable protein sources that store well and don't rely on refrigeration. The key is to not be caught protein-poor. If you plan ahead, you'll have the strength to get through an emergency on more than just crackers and candy.



9. Over-the-Counter Medicines – Stock a Mini Pharmacy

Bought Too Late:

When a health crisis or disaster hits, **basic medicines vanish from the shelves**. Pain relievers (acetaminophen, ibuprofen), fever reducers, cold and flu meds, antihistamines, anti-diarrheals – all these can become *worth their weight in gold*. We saw it happen during COVID-19 surges: people bought out Tylenol, cough syrup, and even vitamins. In any emergency, pharmacies are swamped or closed, and **OTC meds “vanish in every health crisis”**. If you wait until you or a family member is sick or injured amid a disaster, you may find the medicine aisle picked clean.²⁵

Grab Now Instead:

Build an OTC medicine stockpile now, when supplies are plentiful. You don't have to spend a fortune all at once. Adopt the habit of buying **one extra box or bottle** of commonly used meds each time you shop.²⁶ Focus on the essentials: pain relievers (both acetaminophen and ibuprofen, since they serve different purposes), aspirin (good to have for heart attacks as well), cold medicine, cough drops, antihistamines for allergies, anti-diarrheal pills (very important if water or food issues cause stomach illness), anti-acid or indigestion meds, and any vitamins or supplements you deem important. Don't forget things like electrolyte packets (to rehydrate if someone is ill) and basic first-aid ointments (antibiotic cream) – we'll cover first aid gear next, but it overlaps with meds. **Organize your medicine kit** by category and note expiration dates.²⁶ Store them in a cool, dry place. Many meds remain effective for a while past expiration, but potency can drop, so rotate and use what you stock. For liquid medicines,

pay extra attention to shelf life and consider focusing more on pills (which generally store longer and tolerate temperature swings better). Both urban and rural preppers should think about scenarios like a winter flu when roads are closed, or a pandemic lockdown – you want to have **fever reducers and cough medicine on hand** to treat your family at home. By preparing a personal “pharmacy” now, you’ll avoid the dangerous situation of being sick *and* unable to find medicine. In a crisis, the last thing you want is to roam from store to store looking for something as common as ibuprofen. Stock it now and rest easy knowing you can handle minor illnesses and injuries that come your way.



10. Prescription Medications – Secure an Emergency Supply

Bought Too Late:

One of the scariest scenarios is running out of critical **prescription medications** during a crisis. Whether it's insulin, blood pressure meds, asthma inhalers, or any daily prescription – in normal times, you refill just on schedule.

But if a disaster closes pharmacies or supply lines, you could be out of meds in days. Unfortunately, many people realize this *too late*. Pharmacies get overrun and **it becomes difficult to find or refill prescriptions in emergencies.**²⁷ During hurricanes or evacuations, those who didn't plan ahead have had to ration pills or go without, risking their health.

Grab Now Instead:

[Aim to create a buffer supply of your essential prescriptions.](#)

This can be challenging due to insurance refill limits, but talk to your doctor and explain you're preparing for emergencies. Often, you can get a **90-day prescription** instead of 30-day.²⁸ Many insurers allow a one-time emergency refill or vacation override – use these to build up an extra month or two of meds that you can keep in reserve. Rotate your stock so that this emergency supply stays within date (use the oldest meds and replace with new when you refill). Store prescriptions in a **cool, dark, dry place** (heat and moisture can degrade meds).²⁹ If refrigeration is required (like insulin), think about backup power for your fridge or a portable cooler with ice packs during outages. For life-critical meds, consult your doctor about **any safe alternatives or adjustments** if you ever had to stretch doses – not something you want to do, but good to discuss ahead of time. Another tactic: if you physically go to your doctor, ask for **samples** (doctors often have sample packs of meds from pharmaceutical reps; these can become part of your emergency stash). **Never wait until you're on your last pill to refill** – in a disaster, that approach could be fatal. Rural preppers far from pharmacies might already do this, but urban folks should, too, because city pharmacies can be stripped bare in a crisis. And if you rely on mail-order pharmacy, keep track of shipping times – a disaster may delay mail. In short, treat prescription meds as *top priority items* to secure in advance. Your life or well-being could depend on not running out. Plan

now, and you won't have to gamble on finding a refill when the world's upside down.



11. First Aid Supplies – Prepare to Patch Up Injuries

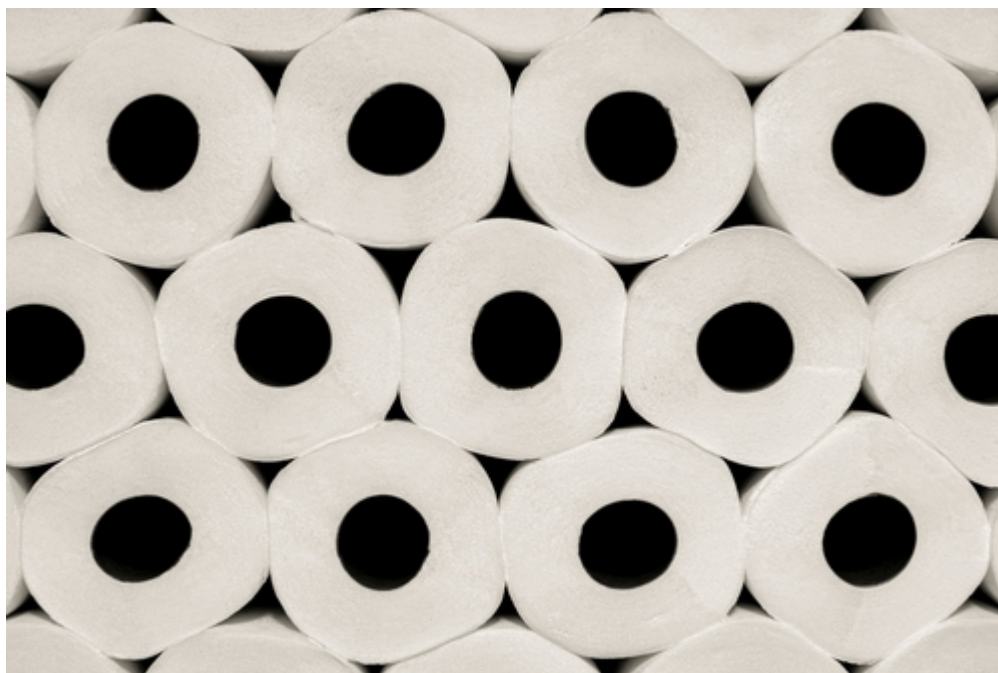
Bought Too Late:

First aid kits and medical supplies often get overlooked – until someone is bleeding or hurt in a crisis. Then, suddenly, everyone wants bandages, disinfectant, and gloves. After major disasters, stores run low on things like gauze, medical tape, peroxide, and other first aid basics as people belatedly assemble kits. If you don't already have these items, trying to buy them amidst an emergency (or while authorities are advising you to stay indoors) is not ideal. An injury in a disaster is double trouble if you have no supplies to treat it on the spot.

Grab Now Instead:

[Build a comprehensive first aid kit now, and learn how to use it.](#) At minimum, have plenty of **bandages** (of all sizes),

sterile **gauze pads**, adhesive tape, and elastic bandages for sprains. Stock **antiseptics**: alcohol wipes, povidone-iodine, and antibiotic ointment to clean and protect wounds. Include **pain relievers** and any OTC meds (from item #9) in your kit. Add tools: tweezers (for splinters or ticks), sharp scissors or trauma shears (to cut clothing or gauze), a digital thermometer, and disposable **gloves** to keep things sanitary. A good first aid manual or printed cheat sheets are invaluable – in a crisis your mind might be racing, so instructions help. If someone in your family has specific needs (e.g. an EpiPen for allergies), make sure that's in the kit and not expired. For **urban preppers**, space is limited, but even a small kit in a pouch can hold a lot of lifesaving gear – stash it in your apartment and maybe a smaller version in your bag. **Rural preppers** might be far from medical help, so consider extra items like a tourniquet, splint materials, and a greater quantity of supplies. Also consider **“bleed control” items** like hemostatic gauze or tourniquets if you're preparing for severe injuries (these have saved lives in accidents and disasters). Don't forget personal items: if you wear glasses, keep an old spare pair; if you have dentures or hearing aids, have backup batteries or supplies. And practice some basic first aid skills (many resources available, even local Red Cross classes). By having a well-stocked first aid kit ready, you can treat injuries at home and avoid a potentially overwhelmed emergency room. It's often said that in a disaster, *“the life you save may be your own (or a loved one's)”* – so get those bandages and learn how to stop the bleed *now*, not when it's too late.



12. Toilet Paper – Bulk Buy (and Alternatives) Before the Rush

Bought Too Late:

We all remember the **Great Toilet Paper Shortage** at the start of the pandemic. Toilet paper is bulky, essential, and something no one wants to run out of, so it becomes a prime target for panic-buying. In fact, **toilet paper is often the very first thing to go in an emergency.**³⁰ Whether it's a hurricane forecast or a lockdown announcement, stores get cleared of TP in hours. If you're late to the game, you'll be staring at empty shelves (and maybe kicking yourself). Sure, TP isn't *truly* lifesaving like water or medicine, but it greatly affects comfort and sanitation. As any prepper knows, it's better to have it than be desperately seeking it (people have done some awkward things when TP was unavailable).

Grab Now Instead:

Stock up on toilet paper in advance, in reasonable bulk. This doesn't mean hoard 10 years' worth; it means always keep a

healthy surplus so you can outlast disruptions. Buy in bulk packs when it's on sale and store the extra in a dry place (plastic bins or bags can protect it from moisture and pests). Figure out your household's usage and aim to have at least a few months' supply set aside. **Rotate your stash** (use the older packs first and replace with new) to avoid the TP degrading in storage – although properly kept, TP lasts basically forever. Critically, also **prepare alternatives**. If you truly run out, you'll need a plan B for your behind. One prepper tip is to install a **bidet attachment** on your toilet – this was a game changer for many during the 2020 TP crisis. A simple \$30 bidet sprayer can dramatically cut TP use by cleaning with water. Also consider **reusable cloth wipes** (often called “family cloth”): pieces of clean cloth that can be washed, sanitized, and reused – not everyone's first choice, but in an emergency it beats nothing.^{31 32} Keep a bucket or sealable bin to safely soak used cloths if you go that route. For short-term emergencies, even napkins, paper towels, or tissues (if you have them) can substitute – just don't flush those, dispose of them properly. For **urban folks** in apartments, storage is tight, but you can cram TP rolls into all sorts of nooks (top shelves, under beds). **Rural folks** with land might even store a year's worth in the garage. However you do it, ensure you won't be the person caught in a crisis without this creature comfort. Few things cause household panic like the last roll disappearing – solve that now by stockpiling and strategizing alternatives.



13. Cleaning Supplies and Bleach – Disinfectants Don't Last on Shelves

Bought Too Late:

A health emergency hits (say a virus outbreak) or water is contaminated, and suddenly **bleach, disinfectant wipes, and cleaning sprays** are worth their weight in gold. We saw it in 2020: Lysol, Clorox wipes, hand sanitizer – all gone overnight. **Bleach and other disinfectants become hot commodities during outbreaks.**³⁴ People also grab cleaning supplies in storms (bleach to purify water or clean flood mess) and general emergencies (nobody wants sickness on top of crisis). If you try to purchase these after panic sets in, you'll face either empty shelves or strict limits (remember "2 per customer" signs?) and possibly steep prices.

Grab Now Instead:

[Store a cache of key cleaning and sanitation supplies before anything happens.](#) Top of the list is **unscented household bleach** – it's cheap and incredibly versatile (for disinfecting surfaces *and* purifying water in proper dilution). A gallon or

two stored away (check expiration, as bleach loses potency in about a year) is smart. Alternatively, **pool shock (calcium hypochlorite)** can be stored as a powder and used to make bleach solution on demand – a small packet can treat thousands of gallons of water (advanced prepper trick, but worth researching if you're serious). Stock up on **disinfectant wipes or sprays** for easy sanitation, and **hand sanitizer** (with at least 60% alcohol) for when soap and water aren't readily available. If commercial products become unavailable, be ready to **make DIY disinfectant**: plain bleach diluted 1:10 with water is a hospital-grade disinfectant; or use alcohol (70% isopropyl) in a spray bottle. White vinegar is also handy for general cleaning (not a hospital-level disinfectant on its own, but useful for many tasks). The **Imperfectly Happy** blog recommends storing concentrated cleaners and using vinegar or alcohol to mix your own solution if needed.³⁴ Also consider hygiene items like garbage bags (for waste), dish soap, laundry detergent (get a few extra bottles or pods). In a prolonged grid-down, **sanitation is crucial** to prevent disease. For both urban and rural preppers, garbage pickup might stop, or water treatment might falter – cleaning supplies help you safely manage waste and keep living areas sanitary. If you have infants in the house, include extra **baby-safe cleaners** and plenty of diapers/wipes (see next item). By having these supplies on hand, you won't be desperately searching for bleach or alcohol when everyone else is, and you can keep your environment clean and disease-free when it matters most.



14. Toiletries and Feminine Hygiene – Personal Care for the Long Haul

Bought Too Late:

In any extended crisis, people quickly realize they're running out of everyday personal care items. **Toiletries like soap, shampoo, toothpaste, deodorant, and feminine hygiene products** (pads, tampons) are not immediately life-saving, but try going a week without them – it gets uncomfortable fast. During panic buying, these items are **swept off shelves quickly**.³⁵ We've seen tampon shortages even in normal times due to supply issues – in a disaster, it's even worse. If you have a baby, diapers and wipes disappear in a flash (more on that below). Essentially, anything to do with hygiene tends to go early because people realize there might be shortages and they do *not* want to be caught without. If you attempt to buy these after everyone else has started stocking up, you may find only the least popular or super expensive brands left.

Grab Now Instead:

Stock up on personal hygiene essentials now, when you have the luxury of choice and sales. Think in categories: dental care (toothpaste, spare toothbrushes, floss), bathing (bars of soap store well, and/body wash, plus extra bottles of shampoo), and grooming (razors, shaving cream if needed). Don't forget **toilet paper** (covered above) and **feminine products**: calculate how many your household uses in a month and aim to have several months' worth stored. These items are compact – you can fill a plastic bin with enough bars of soap, toothpaste tubes, and tampons to last a year and tuck it in a closet. **Buy in bulk or use coupons** when possible to save money.³⁶ Also consider sustainable alternatives: menstrual cups or reusable cloth pads can back up or replace disposable feminine products (useful knowledge if stores are empty). For soap, having some bottles of plain unscented bleach-free **hand soap** or castile soap is great (castile soap can multi-task for dishes, laundry, even shampoo in a pinch). **Urban preppers** might focus on items that manage garbage and pests too – like extra trash bags, disinfectant (from item #13), and maybe pest control (flies and rats can become a problem if sanitation breaks down). **Rural preppers** often have well water – ensure you have extra **soap for laundry** since you can't just buy more clothes easily in a disaster; stock detergent or learn to make your own. Store hygiene items in airtight bins if your area is humid (to prevent them from degrading). By anticipating your family's needs – from daily showers to that time of the month – you'll maintain morale and health. Staying clean isn't just a luxury; it prevents illness and lifts spirits when everything else is chaotic. So don't just prep beans and bullets – **prep the shampoo and ChapStick too!** You'll be glad you did.



15. Baby and Pet Supplies – Don't Forget Your Little Ones (Furry or Otherwise)

Bought Too Late:

It's heartbreaking but common: people stock up for themselves and overlook **babies and pets**. Only when a crisis is underway do they realize Junior has just a day's worth of formula left, or Fido's bag of kibble is almost empty. In emergencies, **baby essentials (formula, diapers, wipes) vanish fast** because they are absolutely non-negotiable.³⁷ Likewise, pet food and supplies often run out – pets are often *forgotten* in emergency prep until their owners see shelves empty of pet food.³⁸ During COVID, for example, pet food shortages caught many off guard. If you're scrambling to find specific formula or pet medication during a disaster, you could be out of luck when stores are closed or sold out.

Grab Now Instead:

[Stockpile for your dependents, human and animal, now.](#) If you have an **infant**, ensure you have a sizable supply of **formula** (if used) and **baby food**. Aim for at least a couple weeks' worth at all times.³⁹ Formula is one thing you can't easily jury-rig a substitute for – babies have specific nutritional needs. If mom is nursing, think about what she might need (extra calories for mom, or a backup plan if nursing is interrupted). **Diapers** are another priority: buy in bulk and keep an extra pack or two in the next sizes up as well (babies grow!). Don't forget **wipes, rash cream, and any medications** (baby Tylenol, etc.). Rotate diapers and formula as needed so they don't expire or the baby outgrows them – you can donate extras if your baby moves past a stage. For **pets**, store at least **two weeks (preferably a month or more) of pet food**.⁴⁰ Dry kibble can be stored in airtight bins to keep it fresh; canned pet food lasts long on its own. If your pet is on any medications or special diet, make sure to have those on hand. Have extra **cat litter** for cats, and poop bags for dogs to manage waste. A pet first aid kit is wise too. Importantly, have a plan for water for your pets (they drink too!) – include them in your one-gallon-per-person allotment, roughly **one ounce of water per pound of pet per day** as a rule of thumb. **Urban pet owners** in apartments should think about how to take pets out if there's chaos – maybe potty pads for dogs if going outside is unsafe. **Rural pet owners** might have livestock – that's a whole other level of prep (stock feed, hay, etc. well ahead of time). Also consider comfort items: a stressed baby or pet is calmed by the familiar, so having their regular food, a pacifier, or a favorite toy during upheaval can help. Ultimately, **their survival and comfort depend on you**. So prep for them with the same urgency you prep for yourself. You don't want to be in a situation where you have food but your baby doesn't, or you're eating canned stew while your dog looks at you hungry. Take care of the little

and furry members of your household by **grabbing their essentials now**, not later.



16. Emergency Communication (Radios) – Don't Count on Cell Networks

Bought Too Late:

When the power grid fails or a disaster knocks out infrastructure, **modern communication networks (cell service, internet)** can go down hard. Many people realized in recent hurricanes and wildfires that they had no way to get information once the cell towers were out and Wi-Fi was off. At that moment, they all wanted **battery-powered radios**, walkie-talkies, or NOAA weather radios – and of course, those were sold out or unavailable. Communications gear isn't usually top-of-mind until **people are cut off and panic hits**. If you wait until after the disaster to think about a radio, you'll be literally and figuratively in the dark, possibly unable to call for help or receive critical news.

Grab Now Instead:

Equip yourself with reliable emergency communications now.

Every household should have at least one **battery-powered or hand-crank emergency radio** that can receive AM/FM and NOAA weather bands.⁴¹ These radios are lifelines – they let you hear government alerts, news, and instructions when other channels are dead. There are inexpensive models that also include solar charging and USB ports. Get one and keep it in an easily accessible spot (and test it!). As one disaster survivor put it, *“everyone should have a battery or self-powered portable radio in their home”*⁴² – it’s true. Next, consider **two-way communication**: a pair of FRS/GMRS walkie-talkies for family use if you’re separated (great for both urban neighborhoods and rural properties). If you’re more tech-savvy, you might pursue a **ham radio license** and a handheld ham radio – during many crises, amateur radio operators provide essential comms when all else fails. (In fact, ham radio was credited with saving lives when Hurricane Helene hit one community, acting as the only link out.)⁴³ For simpler options, even those little long-range walkie-talkies you can buy at Walmart can let you communicate with neighbors or group members if cell phones die. Also ensure you have **backup power** (batteries or solar charger) for these devices. If you live in a city high-rise, a radio might be your only source of outside info if the grid’s down; if you’re rural, you might be cut off for days and a radio could let you call in needs or get weather updates. Don’t neglect **simple things** like an old-fashioned corded phone if you have landline service (landlines sometimes work when power is out, since they’re powered by the phone line itself – useful if cell phones fail). In summary, make a communications plan now: know how you’d get info and contact help if phones and internet were unavailable. Acquire the devices and knowledge beforehand. The peace of mind from hearing a reassuring voice on the radio in a disaster is huge – and it’s only possible if you **prepare your comms gear in advance**.



17. Home Defense (Firearms and Ammo) – Arm and Train Before Trouble Starts

Bought Too Late:

When society feels unstable – say during riots, economic collapse fears, or talk of new gun restrictions – there's always a **massive surge in firearm and ammunition sales**. People who never owned a gun suddenly want one for protection. The result? Gun stores get overrun, popular models sell out, and ammunition of common calibers becomes scarce or exorbitantly priced. We saw this in 2020: record gun purchases created an **ammo shortage across the United States**⁴⁴, affecting even law enforcement supplies. If you decide you need a weapon *after* threats are already present, you may face waiting periods, background check delays, or simply empty shelves. In an actual breakdown of order (looting, etc.), it will definitely be too late to arm yourself **if you haven't already**.

Grab Now Instead:

Address your home and personal defense needs now, well ahead of any crisis. If you are legally able and so inclined, consider purchasing a **firearm (or firearms) and sufficient ammunition** *before* you ever need to use them. Research what suits your situation – a shotgun or handgun for home defense, perhaps a rifle if you need to hunt for food. *Train and practice* with it regularly so you're comfortable and safe in its use. Owning a gun without training is not much better than not having one at all. **Stock up on ammo gradually** when it's available and affordable; ammo keeps for a long time if stored dry and cool. Don't wait for headlines of unrest to try and buy 9mm rounds – they'll be gone. Even aside from extreme events, having a means of self-defense is part of preparedness. However, firearms aren't the only means: **pepper spray, bear spray, tasers, or a good baton** can be effective self-defense tools, especially in urban settings where gun ownership may be restricted or where a non-lethal option is preferred. Acquire and learn to use these now (pepper spray is legal in most places and can deter both two- and four-legged threats). Also consider your **home security**: reinforce doors, have strong locks, maybe a security system or at least a loud battery-powered alarm. Those physical preparations can deter trouble without a fight. For rural preppers, defense might also include protecting livestock from predators – a rifle can serve double duty for that. The overarching point is **don't count on last-minute measures for security**. If things have gotten so bad you suddenly want a gun, it's likely too late to easily get one. Make that decision in calm times and prepare accordingly. Likewise, join self-defense classes or community watch groups *before* you actually need those skills. In a crisis, law enforcement could be stretched thin – you are your own first responder. So fortify your homestead, arm yourself within the bounds of the law, and you won't be left defenseless if crime or chaos spikes when SHTF.



18. Off-Grid Cooking and Heat – Stoves, Fuel, and Warmth When Power Fails

Bought Too Late:

When the electricity and natural gas go out, suddenly **millions of people cannot cook or heat their homes**. In these moments, everyone scrambles for **camp stoves, propane, charcoal, firewood, and portable heaters**. Predictably, those items become scarce quickly. During winter storms, stores sell out of propane cylinders and space heaters in mere hours. After hurricanes, **grills and camping stoves become hot commodities**, as folks still need to boil water or cook with no power.⁴⁵ If you wait until you're shivering or eating cold beans out of a can, you might find there's no stove or fuel left to buy.

Grab Now Instead:

[Set yourself up with alternative cooking and heating methods now.](#) For cooking, one of the simplest is a **camping stove** that

runs on propane or butane. These small stoves (like those single-burner butane stoves or the classic Coleman 2-burner propane stove) are affordable and easy to use – perfect for apartment balconies or backyards in an emergency. **Store extra fuel canisters** safely – those little 1 lb propane bottles or butane cans; they last for years if not leaking. If you have a barbecue grill, make sure you always have a spare propane tank or a stock of charcoal. Keep **multiple lighters and waterproof matches** on hand too.⁴⁵ A simple **rocket stove** (which you can even DIY from bricks or cans) is a great backup that burns twigs or wood very efficiently – useful for rural folks who have wood around, or even urbanites who could scavenge broken furniture for fuel. For heating, if you're in a cold climate, consider a **Mr. Buddy indoor-safe propane heater** or similar – but *buy it before* the blizzard, because they routinely sell out when a cold snap hits. And of course, have the fuel for it (propane cylinders, kerosene for kerosene heaters, etc.) stored safely. **Never rely on open flames indoors without proper ventilation** (carbon monoxide is deadly) – so things like unvented kerosene heaters or charcoal grills **must NOT be used indoors**. If you have a wood fireplace or stove, ensure you have a good stockpile of **firewood** well ahead of winter (and properly dried). **Urban dwellers** might not be able to install wood stoves, but they can still have warm clothing, quality sleeping bags, and emergency Mylar blankets to stay warm if heat is out. In both city and country, a **tent set up indoors** can trap body heat and keep you warmer at night if you have no other heat. Think creatively: during the 2021 Texas freeze, some people safely ran portable propane camp stoves for short periods to boil water and cook – those who had them fared much better. So, buy that camp stove and heater now, not when the shelves are bare. Store fuels now, not when trucks stop delivering. And test your gear! Cook a meal on your camp stove or fire pit *before* you need to rely on it. By prepping alternative cooking and heating solutions, you ensure that even if the grid goes down, you can still have a warm meal and

a warm place to sleep. That kind of self-reliance can literally be life-saving in extreme conditions.



19. Cash and Barter Items – Have Currency When ATMs Go Down

Bought Too Late:

In our digital age, many people don't keep much cash on hand. But when power outages or cyber failures hit, **ATMs stop working and credit card machines go offline**. Suddenly, only cash is accepted for the few stores or gas stations that might be open. Those without cash find themselves unable to buy necessities. We've seen this during blackouts and after severe storms – **people lining up at dead ATMs or banks**, which of course can't help until systems are back. By the time most realize they need physical cash, it's too late (banks closed, ATMs empty). Similarly, in a prolonged crisis or economic breakdown, certain **barter items** become extremely valuable – think cigarettes, alcohol, and coffee for example. These comfort goods disappear early (even non-users grab them, anticipating trading).⁴⁶ If you realize after a crisis that a

bottle of whiskey could get you batteries or that your neighbor would trade fresh eggs for coffee, well, you either have those items or you don't – you can't easily "buy" them late in the game.

Grab Now Instead:

Prepare a financial and barter cushion before any emergency.

Always keep a reserve of **cash in small bills** in a safe, accessible place. How much depends on your means, but even \$100-\$200 stashed can buy food or gas in a pinch. Small bills (\$1s, \$5s, \$10s) are important because in a scenario where change systems are down, a \$20 might not get you change. Think of cash for specific needs: fuel, groceries, perhaps a night in a motel out of town – what would you need if cards stopped working for a week? Have that on hand. Next, consider **precious metals or portable valuables** if you're preparing for severe economic trouble – a few silver coins or a bit of gold could be a hedge (recognize that not every crisis involves a currency collapse, but it's classic prepper insurance). More practically, **stockpile some high-demand goods** purely for barter. **Alcohol and tobacco** are prime examples: even if you don't drink or smoke, bottles of whiskey and packs of cigarettes could be top trading items when stressed populations seek a little comfort.⁴⁶ They also have long shelf lives. Other barter items include: coffee (an unopened jar of instant coffee or some vacuum-packed ground coffee), tea, sugar, chocolate, ammo (if you're comfortable trading that), first aid supplies, hygiene items like extra toothpaste or soap, and fuel canisters. Basically, think of cheap items now that would be scarce and desired in crisis. **Rural preppers** might also consider bartering their excess (like eggs, garden produce, firewood) but that's situational. **Urban preppers** may find barter useful if cash loses value or if they have skills to trade (keep some tools or repair kits if you plan to barter labor). The key is, by having **cash and goods ready**, you maintain the ability to obtain what you need when normal

commerce is disrupted. You won't be among the frantic crowds at ATMs (which might not even work); instead, you'll calmly pull out the emergency envelope of cash. And if it's a long slog and money loses meaning, you have tangible items to trade for things money can't buy at that moment. This kind of foresight can keep you economically resilient when others are helpless.



20. The Bug-Out Bag – Pack Your Go-Bag Before You Need to Flee

Bought Too Late:

When authorities issue an evacuation order – say a wildfire is 5 miles out or a chemical spill is heading your way – people have *minutes* to leave. Too often, folks start throwing random supplies into a suitcase at the last second, or they rush to Walmart (if it's even open) to grab things they suddenly realize they need. This is how critical items get forgotten. We've all seen footage of highways jammed with evacuees; imagine realizing you didn't bring any food, or spare batteries, or even essential documents. At that point, it's

too late to assemble a proper emergency kit. Some people even attempt to buy pre-made “survival kits” online after a disaster hits, hoping it arrives in time – not a good plan. **A bug-out bag that isn’t ready to go when you are, is no help at all.**

Grab Now Instead:

Assemble your bug-out bag (Go-Bag) now, and keep it ready. A bug-out bag is a portable kit with everything you need to survive for at least 72 hours when you’re on the move. You should tailor it to your needs, but basics include: water (e.g. a few water pouches or a filter like a LifeStraw), non-perishable high-energy food (energy bars, trail mix, MREs), a first aid kit, a change of clothes and sturdy footwear, a blanket or bivy sack, a fire-starting method (lighter, matches), flashlight and extra batteries, a multitool, cash, copies of important documents (IDs, insurance) in a waterproof pouch, and any critical personal items (like medications, an extra pair of glasses, etc.). Pack these in a comfortable backpack **now**, not later. Keep the bag in an easy-to-grab spot (front closet, under your bed). If you have family, each member should have a bag or you should have a larger bag with communal supplies and smaller ones for personal items. Don’t forget supplies for pets in your evacuation kit (food, leash, collapsible bowl). **Urban residents** should plan routes and transport for evacuation – your bug-out bag might include a map of the city and a USB power bank for your phone. **Rural residents** might need to bug out if wildfire or flooding threatens; include maps of back roads in case main routes are jammed. Also have seasonal adjustments – in winter, add hand warmers and extra jackets; in summer, sunscreen and bug spray. The crucial part is to **pack all this in advance**. When the knock comes on the door saying “you have 5 minutes to leave,” you won’t be paralyzed or scrambling. You’ll grab your go-bag (and maybe a pre-packed bin of irreplaceable keepsakes you prepared) and get out safely. Revisit and update your bug-out

bag every few months or at least annually – swap out expired food, clothes that no longer fit kids, etc. Conduct family drills if possible, treating it like a game (“We have 10 minutes to evacuate – what do we do?”). This will reveal if your plans need tweaking. By having a go-bag ready, you’ve essentially **bought insurance against panic** – you won’t need to dash to the store or tear apart your house for supplies under duress. It’s all there, in the bag, because smart prepper you *thought ahead*.

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Conclusion

Disasters don’t wait for convenient timing – and they certainly won’t wait for you to finish a last-minute shopping trip. The hard truth is, if **you wait until “the next wave” of panic to prepare, you’ve waited too long.**⁴⁷ The good news? By identifying these commonly “too-late” items now, you can take action *today*. Start building your stockpile item by item, week by week. Prioritize water, food, medicine, and other life-sustainers, but don’t neglect comfort and morale boosters. **Test your gear** (fire up that generator or camp stove on a calm afternoon) and rotate your supplies to keep them fresh. Get your family involved – make it a mission, not a chore. If you live in an urban area, focus on clever storage and portability; if you’re rural, take advantage of space to become self-sufficient.

Remember, **preparedness is the antidote to panic**. When the next crisis comes – and it will, whether big or small – you won't be the one racing through picked-over aisles or sitting in the dark worrying. You'll be ready, your family will be fed and safe, and you'll have the tools to handle whatever happens. As the saying goes, *"The more you sweat in peace, the less you bleed in war."* In preparedness terms: the more you **prep before a disaster, the less you'll suffer during one.**⁴⁷ So take this as your call to action: [grab your list and start prepping these items now.](#) Every can of food, every filled water jug, every skill learned is an investment in your resilience. Build your stockpile, secure your home, and have a plan – do it before the storm clouds are on the horizon. You'll thank yourself later when you sail through the next emergency with confidence, while others wish they had acted sooner.⁴⁷ The best time to get prepared was yesterday; the second best time is today!

Other Preppers Are Reading Now:

>> [The Secret Water Source Even the Bible Talks About \(VIDEO\)<<](#)

>> [How to Shield Everything You Own from the Next Grid Collapse <<](#)

>> [The Herbal Cure Collection Doctors Don't Want You to Know <<](#)

>> [How to Build a Survival Stockpile That Lasts \(VIDEO\)<<](#)

[The Backyard Farm That Works Anywhere](#)



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