

What to do before, during, and after earthquakes

Earthquakes are happening in our county almost every day, and they will continue to happen regardless of your opinion about these natural disasters.

The problem with earthquake preparedness is that, somehow, such an issue is ignored by many, and it doesn't seem to be a concern anymore. It always happens somewhere else.

Since natural disasters are the leading cause of property destruction in the United States, it would be wise not to ignore this calamity that can hit us at any time. It is wise to learn what to do before, during, and after a quake.

Just like many of the folks out there, you, too, probably believe that an earthquake is not something to be concerned about. In reality, that's far from the truth, and every state in our country is at risk.

Earthquake facts

To avoid gaining a false sense of security, believing that you are safe from a quake and that it won't happen to you, there are a few things you should learn about earthquakes.



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An earthquake is described as a rapid shaking of the earth. The leading cause of the earth's movement is the breaking and

shifting of underground rocks caused by a release of the underground strain accumulated over decades and centuries.

Every earthquake has a similar pattern, and it starts with a mild shaking that may grow in strength over just a few seconds. In some cases, what is initially felt as a gentle shaking can become an extremely violent movement.

After the initial quake, there may be other earthquakes following, called aftershocks. These generally have a smaller intensity than the initial earth movement. However, there have been cases in which more significant aftershocks occurred.

The problem with earthquakes is that people believe only “big ones” can be dangerous. This is a wrong assumption since even mild tremors can turn household items into projectiles or cause buildings to collapse after damaging their foundations. Not to mention that the infrastructure can also be affected, and bridges and dams can collapse after the earth has stopped moving.

Another thing that we should acknowledge is that earthquakes can lead to other natural disasters such as wildfires caused by explosions, landslides, and tsunamis.

Where will the next one hit?

This is a question that is hard to answer since earthquakes occur in our country almost every day and all 50 states and five US territories are at risk. However, a national seismic risk map (find it here www.usgs.gov) can tell you if you live in a region prone to earthquakes.

As a quick recap, here are the regions with a higher risk for earthquakes:

- The San Andreas Fault in California;
- The New Madrid Fault Zone spanning areas in Missouri, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Kentucky;

- The Cascadia Subduction Zone in western Oregon;
- Certain areas on the East Coast, including the mid-Atlantic, coastal South Carolina, and New England;
- Washington and Alaska.

While it's somehow relatively easy to predict where earthquakes will hit following the data and national hazard map provided by our government, the "when?" is the question we don't have an answer for.

We cannot predict earthquakes, and they can happen at any time without warning. Even more, the aftershock can sometimes occur for hours or days after the initial shaking of the earth, and there's no telling when they will stop.

As said before, it's better to learn what you can do to protect yourself and your loved ones if you live in a seismic high-risk area. So, let's look into it.

Before the earthquake

In terms of storing critical supplies, you are pretty much covered if you are a prepper. You probably already have water and food stored to survive for a year, you have medication to last you for a few months, and you have made preparations to keep your documents and valuables secured.

One thing you should do is secure all the items in your house that could move or fall, leading to injuries or damage. It should be a common practice to secure your bookshelves, mirrors, and light fixtures, but the same should be done for your water heater and other items that could become a hazard to your family members.

Make sure you also secure any items that hang over places where people sit or lie since these can move and cause injuries to those in beds, couches, or cribs.

Also, it would help if you prepared in advance to have a

communication plan in place to reach all your family members when the quake strikes. We've discussed here at Survivopedia the need to have a communication plan ready since a disaster can strike at any time, and chances are you will not be together with your loved ones when it does.

Do regular maintenance on your home and make sure it will withstand any earth movement that may hit your area. If you have no idea how your house was built and how sturdy it is, it would be wise to consult a structural engineer and make a brief evaluation. You will figure out if there are areas that would need to be strengthened to withstand a quake.

If you are moving to a seismic high-risk area and plan to buy or rent a property, always check if the building follows the local building codes and is earthquake resistant.

Have an evacuation or bug-out plan ready at any time since you never know what can happen after an earthquake hits your area. As said before, a quake can lead to other natural disasters, and you may be forced to evacuate, so be ready to do so. For example, those living near the coast should always consider the possibility of tsunamis hitting their area. Therefore, they should have a tsunami evacuation plan ready.

To prevent any gas leaks, it would be wise to install an earthquake shut-off valve. In certain regions, these are legally required. Even if that's not the case for your property, it's still recommended to have one installed if you cannot shut off the gas line manually.

During an earthquake

How you act during an earthquake depends on where you are located and what you do when the quake hits. Here are a few scenarios you should consider:

If you are inside a building

- You should know how to drop down, cover, and hold on. Once the ground starts to shake, drop down onto your hands and knees so that the quake doesn't knock you down. You will need to cover your head and neck with your arms to protect yourself from falling debris.
- If particular falling objects can harm you, the best thing you can do is seek cover under a sturdy table or desk.
- If you can't find any cover, you should move away from windows, anything with glass, and outside doors and walls. Move next to an interior wall for cover.
- If you lack cover, use your arms to protect your neck or use whatever is available to create some protective layer, a book, a pillow, etc.
- Stay under or next to your cover until the shaking stops. Do not make the mistake of trying to run outside since there's no guarantee you can make it, especially if you have to get down a flight of stairs (one of the most dangerous places to be during a quake).
- If you are in your bed, stay there and try to protect your head and neck with a pillow or blanket. Do not try to jump out of bed and run to safety since you will not move safely in the dark. Hazards are challenging to be seen and avoid at night, and your action will result in more injuries.
- Those in a wheelchair or various mobility devices should lock their wheels. Once you secure the wheels, bend over and remain seated until the quake passes. Cover your head and protect your neck using whatever's available.

If you are outside a building

- When you are outdoors and a quake starts, you should move away from buildings and pretty much anything that can become a danger to your physical integrity if it falls or breaks apart. Don't stay under utility wires or streetlights and move in the open. Cover your head with

your hands and stay there until the shaking stops.

- If you are in a pool, and the earth starts shaking, try to swim to the lateral side of the pool and get out since the water movement inside a collection can injure or even drown people. Once on the side of the pool, crawl on all four until you manage to get to a safe place. Do not stand up and try to run since you will lose your balance, slip, and end up injuring yourself.
- If you are in a car driving down the road and you feel the earth starts to move, stop as quickly and safely as possible. You should avoid stopping under buildings, overpasses, utility wires, or trees. Do not get out of the car until the quake stops. Also, if you decide to continue your journey by car, you should drive carefully and avoid roads and bridges that the earthquake may have damaged.

What to do after an earthquake

First of all, if you've been through a rain of falling objects, you should check if you or those close to you are injured. The adrenaline rush may prevent you from seeing things clearly, and you have to make sure there are no disabled people that require first-aid.

If you have adequate training, you can assist with rescues and provide medical assistance to those around you.

If the quake stops and you are inside a building, look around to see if there's any visible damage and find a clear path to get out of the building. You should go to an open space and stay as far away as possible from damaged structures. Most damaged buildings will fall during the aftershock.

Contact all family members if you are not together to make sure everyone is ok. Establish how to meet them based on your evacuation plan preparations.

If you are trapped, do not move around because you will kick up dust, and you will not be able to see or breathe properly. If you have your phone with you, use it to call for help. Do not start yelling since you will tire yourself. Please tap on a wall or pipe regularly so that the rescue team can locate you. In case you have a whistle with you, use it in short bursts.

Check the radio, local news reports on TV and social media for emergency information and instructions. This becomes imperative if you live near the coast, where tsunamis can become a real danger. If you know your area is prone to tsunamis, you have to move inland to higher ground.

If and when you get involved in the cleanup process, use extreme caution since working with and around debris can be dangerous. Always wear protective clothing and sturdy, thick-soled boots during cleanup.

Do not go inside a building for any reason unless it's declared safe to do so. Even if you hear someone crying for help, you must be sure you won't cause more harm if you start removing heavy debris. Make sure the structure's integrity won't be affected by your action before attempting to help them.

Concluding

Earthquakes are hardly being discussed, even if such natural disasters can bring destruction and death. We still believe such calamities always happen somewhere else, even if our country has a long history of earthquakes.

If you are curious enough to research this topic more, you will discover some disturbing facts about earthquakes. I guarantee it will be enough to get you thinking about various disaster preparedness methods and how to keep your loved ones safe.



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