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How Much Water Should I Include In My Food Storage?

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A weekly question/answer column

How Much Water Should I Include In My Food Storage?

Charlotte Brennand answers:*

Storage of water is one of the simplest, but most neglected areas of emergency food storage. And this problem is compounded because home food storage programs rely heavily on dried foods such as beans, wheat, and powdered milk. You may have enough calories stored to last 6 months, but do you have enough water? One gallon per day per person is the recommended minimum. But more realistically you should have about 2 quarts for drinking, plus a gallon for washing, plus whatever water you might need for cooking. Here are some tips on preparing water for storage.

- Treated water out of the tap needs nothing added and should have a shelf life of about 10 years. Untreated water, from a well for instance, should be stored with about 16 drops of chlorine bleach per gallon.
- Handy water storage bottles are the two-liter type soda bottles. Wash and rinse thoroughly, fill them up, and set them in the storage area. You may want to discard any cardboard liners like those that are often inside the caps of bottles. Although they pose no health hazard, over time, the cardboard can degrade and cause off colors and flavors.
- Plastic gallon milk bottles are safe, but not durable and may start leaking if stored for long periods.
- Glass gallon bottles like those used for apple cider are also safe, but be careful where you store them as they will break.
- Place a small piece of plastic wrap between metal lids and bottles to avoid metallic flavors after long storage.
- Not all household containers are fit for water storage for human consumption. Bleach bottles, for example, are not approved for food or water storage.

* Charlotte Brennand is Utah State University Extension Food Safety Specialist