

## Water is Vital – Especially after a Disaster

Dehydration occurs when your body loses too much water. When you stop drinking water your cells and tissues lose essential fluids, your muscles begin to get tired, and you may have leg cramps or feel faint. Extreme dehydration may cause blood vessels to collapse.

A normally active person needs to drink at least 2 quarts of water each day. In a hot environment people need twice as much. Children, nursing mothers the elderly, and ill people will need more. Additional water will be required for food preparation and hygiene.

Don't ever ration your water. Drink the amount you need today and try to find more for tomorrow. You can minimize the amount of water your body needs by being inactive and staying cool.

### Hidden water sources in your home

If a disaster catches you without a stored supply of clean water, you can use water in your hot-water tank, in your plumbing, and in ice cubes.

- ◆ To use the water in your pipes, let air into the plumbing by turning on the highest faucet in your house and draining the water from the lowest one.
- ◆ To use the water in your hot-water tank, be sure the electricity or gas is off and then open the drain at the bottom of the tank. Start the water flowing by turning off the water intake valve and turning on a hot-water faucet. Do not turn on the gas or electricity when the tank is empty.

Do you know the location of your incoming water valve? You'll need to shut it off to stop contaminated water from entering your home if you hear reports of broken water or sewage lines.

Other good liquids to help keep you hydrated are 100% fruit juices, skim milk and decaffeinated coffee and tea.

### Three easy ways to purify water

In addition to having a bad odor and taste, contaminated water can contain germs that cause diseases. If you aren't sure water is clean, purify it before you use it. There are many ways to purify water. None are perfect. It is often best to use several methods. Before purifying water, let any suspended particles settle to the bottom of the container or strain the water by pouring it through layers of paper towel or clean cloth.

These methods kill germs but will not remove other contaminants such as heavy metals, salts, most other chemicals, and radioactive fallout.

- ♦ Bring water to a rolling boil for 1 minute. Let the water cool before drinking. Boiled water will taste better if you put oxygen back into it by pouring it back and forth between two containers. This will also improve the taste of stored water.
- ♦ Add two drops of liquid bleach per quart of water (four drops if the water is cloudy), stir and let stand for 30 minutes. If the water does not taste and smell of chlorine at that point, add another dose and let stand another 15 minutes. If you do not have a dropper, use a spoon and a square-ended strip of paper or thin cloth about ¼ inch by 2 inches. Put the strip in the spoon with an end hanging down about ½ inch below the scoop of the spoon. Place bleach in the spoon and carefully tip it. Drops the size of those from a medicine dropper will drip off the end of the strip.

- ♦ Purification tablets release chlorine or iodine. They are inexpensive and available at most sporting goods stores and some drugstores. Follow the package directions. Usually one tablet is enough for 1 quart of water. Double the dose for cloudy water.

## References

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Keep Food and Water Safe after a Natural Disaster or Power Outage."  
<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/foodwater.asp>  
Downloaded October 7, 2005.
- Federal Emergency Management Agency.  
"Emergency Food and Water Supplies."  
<http://www.fema.gov/library/emfdwtr.shtm>  
Downloaded October 3, 2005.
- Simonne, Amy H. (2003). "Preparing for Disasters: Your food and drinking water supply." University of Florida IFAS Extension. Publication #FCS9195.  
<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>  
Downloaded October 4, 2005.

Compiled by Andrew B. Crocker, Extension Program Specialist –  
Gerontology Health, The Texas A&M University System.

### Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

*AgriLifeExtension.tamu.edu*

More Extension publications can be found at *AgriLifeBookstore.org*

Educational programs of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin.

---

The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating.

Produced by Texas A&M AgriLife Communications