

TAKING YOUR FOOD STORAGE FOR A TEST DRIVE

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You have been packing away food religiously for a couple of months. Your [pantry is getting full](#). You even have some tomato sauce put up from last year's garden in the basement! But you still have some nagging worry that [you will not be able to feed your family in the event of a crisis](#).

Well – you might be right! Anyone who has had to eat the same meal several days in a row will tell you that quantity alone does not a well-balanced diet create. I even remember one especially crazy family move as a child when we ate pizza every night for a week in order to have enough time to pack. Even pizza got old after about the third night!

The only way to be sure that any plan will work is to test it, and the same is true with your food supplies. So how do you try out your food storage success without a true emergency? Take it for a test-drive in these easy steps:

1) Stop buying food for one month.

This may very well be the hardest step. For those of us who are used to shopping sales, stocking up, and spending a lot of time thinking about buying food, it will be a big mental shift. But that is all part of the exercise. Make sure not to dip into your food budget for other things, however. Set what you're not spending aside to buy extra the next month to replace what you have used up. If not buying any more food is just too much, then at least leave whatever new things you buy in the bags and put it out of sight in a totally different part of the house from your current food stores. Definitely don't buy any perishable items. If possible, even have another member of the household do the shopping. The point is to realistically assess what you have and what you don't, which won't work if you are still in the mindset of almost limitless food readily available at the store down the street.

2) Eat only what you have.

Now that you have mentally come to grips with the fact that what you see is what you've got (for the next month anyway), eat only that. Do not cheat by ordering a pizza, swinging through the drive-thru for take-out, or eating out a restaurant. Remember that, in a worst case scenario, the same things that would restrict your food supply would also force these places to close their doors. Eating at a friend's house is marginally acceptable if invited (you don't want to lose friends over this!), but do consider the impact of TEOTWAWKI on both your friendship and the possibility of transporting yourself to them.

3) Write it down.

Making a menu is always a good way to prevent food spoilage, save money, rotate food stores, and make the most out of a little. If you are not doing this yet, now is a great time to start. You can start small if you need to just by making a menu at the beginning of the day of what you will eat for breakfast lunch and dinner, but making a week-long menu at the beginning of the week is much more effective. Ultimately, a month-long menu is a great solution for most people. If you are extra-organized or ambitious, you may even want to make a three-month rotating menu that takes into consideration the growing season and what fresh foods will be available when.

Obviously, make sure to eat your fresh/perishable foods first.

In addition to your menu, keep some kind of a journal, even if it is just a running "store" list. Keep track of everything that you use up, and also those things you miss. We often do not realize how much we rely on a steady supply of fresh food for things like dairy, eggs, and even fruits and vegetables. The first time I did this I realized that I had beans, wheat, and canned tomatoes (from a great sale when I really stocked up) to last for a long, long time. I also had a decent surplus of a couple of other grains, oil, and a few spices too. But I ran out of all dairy, fruits, and vegetables within a week or so. I just hadn't adequately calculated how many fresh fruits and vegetables we eat, or the quantity of canned goods would be required to replace those items.

Invariably you will run out of something faster than you think you will, and it might surprise you what that thing is. The key here is to not forget steps one and two! Do not cave and go buy more food (unless it is a health issue for you or someone else in the family). You need to have the experience of making do, substituting, being creative, and yes, even going without. This is what will take your preparedness skills to a whole new level and make this whole thing "real" to you. Don't give up yet!

Oh, and that meal you had at the friend's house? Make sure you write that down too. What did you eat? How would you have replaced that meal at home?

4) Take stock.

So you actually made it to the end of the month without giving in to your fast food demon, or buying "just one gallon of milk." Congratulations! Now it is time to process what you have learned. Sit down and review your notes. If appropriate do this with the whole family. What does your partner have to contribute to the discussion? What did your kids really miss eating? Review your notes and see what you ran out of when, and what you were able to replace it with. What

would have made things easier? Often it is the little things (butter, baking powder, sugar) that, added to the staples, are able to turn something bland into something enjoyable.

Finally, now that you are equipped with more information and a new set of eyes, look through your food stores again. How long do you *really* think you could live comfortably with this food? How long could you survive?

5) Adjust your food storage according to what you find.

Finally, you get to apply all this newly-gained knowledge, won through experience, to start improving your planning. Start getting more of those items you ran out of. Think about other ways to incorporate milk and the items you usually get out of the fridge. Maybe you will discover that you want or need to start storing faster, so you'll need to [save money](#) in order to increase your food storage budget.

Maybe you need skills more than additional food. This can come as a surprise to otherwise good cooks who rely on a some standard favorites. Start trying new recipes, new ingredients, and [new styles of cooking](#). Find a good cookbook with a complete list of substitutions, or start writing down your own (e.g. cake flour can be made with $\frac{3}{4}$ cup plus 2 tablespoons of regular flour mixed with 2 tablespoons of corn starch).

So what are you waiting for? Test drive your food storage starting today. And if you are tempted to wait so you can prepare first, remember that a true emergency will not give you that luxury.