

After the Storm

Managing Chronic Conditions after a Natural Disaster

Natural disasters, such as hurricanes, floods, tornados, and wildfires, can be stressful if you are managing a chronic condition. Learn what to look out for and how to stay well in the aftermath of a disaster.



Alzheimer's Disease



Alzheimer's disease can make it hard for a person to recognize familiar places and faces and can lead to wandering. During an emergency, trying to keep to routines and reassure them they are safe can help keep them from wandering.

- Make sure the person with Alzheimer's wears an ID bracelet.
- Do not leave the person alone. Even those who aren't prone to wandering away may do so in unfamiliar environments or situations.
- When at a shelter, try to stay away from exits and choose a quiet corner.

Cancer



People with cancer who are treated with chemotherapy are more likely to get infections because of their weakened immune system. A disaster can cause you to get an infection in many ways. For example:

- If the power is out for a long time, food in the refrigerator won't stay cold. You could get food poisoning if you eat it.
- Tap water may not be safe to drink.
- Broken pieces of glass, wood, or metal could hurt you.
- Flood water can cause dangerous mold to grow.

One of the best ways to keep yourself from getting sick is to keep your hands clean. Wash your hands often with soap and water. If you don't have clean water or soap, use hand sanitizer.

If you notice any signs of an infection, contact a doctor right away. Common signs and symptoms include a fever, chills and sweats, a sore throat or other pain, nasal congestion, or vomiting.

Diabetes



In a power outage when refrigerated insulin isn't available:

Try to keep your insulin cool, but make sure not to freeze it. Insulin that has been frozen can break down and will be less effective.

Keep your insulin away from direct heat and out of direct sunlight. Heat and sunlight will also make it less effective.

Realistically, you may have to use insulin that's been stored above 86°F. If so, monitor your blood sugar regularly. If you're staying in an emergency shelter, let someone in charge know if your blood sugar is too high or low. Contact your doctor as soon as the emergency is over.

People in areas affected by storms:

Call 1-800-DIABETES (800-342-2382)
Mon-Fri, 9:00 am to 7:00 pm ET.



Heart Disease



Heart Attack



Stroke

Stress from a disaster can lead to heart attack or stroke. Do not drive someone with symptoms to the hospital. Call 9-1-1 for an ambulance so that medical personnel can begin life-saving treatment on the way to the emergency room.

Heart attack symptoms:

- Chest pain or discomfort.
- Feeling weak, light-headed, or faint.
- Pain or discomfort in the jaw, neck, or back.
- Pain or discomfort in one or both arms or shoulders.
- Shortness of breath.

Other symptoms of a heart attack could include unusual or unexplained tiredness and nausea or vomiting. Women are more likely to have these symptoms.

Stroke:

Act F.A.S.T. to help stroke patients get the treatments they need. The stroke treatments that work best are available only if the stroke is recognized and diagnosed within 3 hours of the first symptoms.

- **F—Face:** Ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop?
- **A—Arms:** Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?
- **S—Speech:** Ask the person to repeat a simple phrase. Is the speech slurred or strange?
- **T—Time:** If you see any of these signs, call 9-1-1 right away.



Stress and Mental Health



It's natural to feel stress, anxiety, grief, and worry during and after a disaster. These tips can help.

- **Take care of your body.** Try to eat healthy well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, and get plenty of sleep. Avoid alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.
- **Connect with others.** Share your concerns and how you are feeling with a friend or family member.
- **Take breaks.** Make time to unwind and remind yourself that strong feelings will fade.
- **Stay informed.** When you feel that you are missing information, you may become more stressed or nervous. Watch, listen to, or read the news for updates from reliable sources.
- **Avoid too much exposure to news.** It can be upsetting to hear about the crisis and see images repeatedly. Try to do enjoyable activities and return to normal life as much as possible and check for updates between breaks.
- **Seek help when needed.** If distress impacts activities of your daily life for several days or weeks, talk to a clergy member, counselor, or doctor, or contact 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Call or text 988 or chat at 988lifeline.org.