

Medication Management in Disaster Planning

A family disaster plan can be of valuable assistance to every member of the family. In order for it to be effective, however, it needs to encompass all aspects of your current living situation. When considering a home or family disaster plan, it is easy to overlook medications and the special needs of family members. Instead of waiting for an event to occur, think ahead to these important areas:

1. Know what types of disasters are most likely to affect your area. By learning what to expect in a “typical” disaster, you are more likely to have a plan that will meet the needs of you and your loved ones, especially those with special needs. With the news media bombarding us with messages of terrorism, you may want to concentrate more on the unlikely event instead of looking to the natural disasters that could occur. Are you in a floodplain? Are tornadoes common in your area? Examining these issues now will prevent headaches later.
2. Have an emergency list of physicians and special medications needed. In the event that you need to evacuate an area, this list will become increasingly important. More than ever, communities are developing special shelter hubs for families who have individuals with special needs. When evacuating your community, this list needs to be included in the evacuation kit. Physicians at shelter hospitals can respond more effectively when this information is listed in one place with appropriate contact information if questions arise.
3. If your loved one has a communication barrier, make certain that this information is included in your evacuation material. Disaster workers at the special shelter hub will need to know this information in the event that you are not able to respond immediately. Disaster means chaos for all family members, especially those who are incapacitated in some way. If a communication issue exists, spell it out in detail to avoid adding more confusion to the mix.
4. Provide exact names, dosages, and other pertinent information on all medications that you and your loved ones are currently taking. It may not be possible to take the medication with you. What happens if your supply is exhausted and your regular pharmacy is unavailable for some reason? Medications that are involved in a fire, for example, may not be suitable for use afterwards. Having written documentation of all medications will eliminate the guesswork and legwork needed to track this down later.
5. Are there any allergies or sensitivities that disaster personnel need to know about? It is sometimes too easy to overlook this important piece of information. Drug interactions and other reactions to medication need to be listed as well. Food allergies are another area that can be overlooked. If your loved one is on a special diet, you may want to pack a few nonperishable items and periodically rotate these out of your disaster kit. It will help ease hunger pangs later when it could take time to locate specialized foods.
6. Does your loved one need any special adaptive equipment? In a disaster, this equipment may either be difficult to locate if it is not known in advance. Keep special manufacturer

information in the disaster kit if the equipment is especially hard to find. If possible, purchase additional equipment that is easy to pack and move in the event of an evacuation

7. What if you have to shelter in place? Sheltering in place means that an emergency event is forcing you to remain where you are for the moment. Do you have everything you need for a three to five day stay in one location? Is it possible to keep an extra supply of medications? Are they perishable? If they need to be mixed with bottled water, do you have extra? Make sure to spell out these details in advance to prevent panic at a later date when it may be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for emergency personnel to reach you.
8. Talk to your doctor and pharmacist about the shelf life of medications, both prescription and over the counter (OTC). Having this information in advance will be helpful to you, especially if you are planning to store extra medication for a long period of time. Some medications can be easily stored, while others are impossible to keep for long periods of time. Are there alternative medications that can be stored in lieu of the original prescription? How hard would it be to obtain replacement prescriptions if you had to leave town suddenly without notice?
9. Add disability related supplies to your emergency kit. Some of these supplies include hearing aid batteries, patches for wheelchair tires, an extra walking cane, incontinence supplies, pet supplies (if you have a service animal), magnifying glass, and any other supplies that may be necessary. If you use a motorized wheelchair, see if it is possible to get a manually operated replacement in the event that a power source is not available. Develop a list of supplies and shop for them periodically to be certain that your kit is well stocked.
10. If your community has a registry of persons who need special attention during evacuation procedures, make sure that you and your household are listed. This registry is normally a listing of where you live, how many persons in the household will need assistance during an evacuation, and the type of assistance that you would normally need. Your local emergency management service would be able to direct you to the agency that is in charge of the registry service. During an evacuation, emergency personnel can concentrate on persons who are in the registry, and you don't want to be overlooked if you need extra time or attention to evacuate.

The first lesson here is to be prepared. Families who have mapped out a plan and practiced it are more likely to be prepared for an emergency event than those who have not. Considering the medication and necessary supplies that your loved one will need in the disaster plan from the beginning will help alleviate stress if the plan needs to be activated.

