

MIND • BODY • FOOD

Create an Emergency Food Backup

A practical guide and fill-in worksheet for difficult food days

Make eating more achievable when energy, appetite, executive function or sensory capacity is low. Choose foods that are safe, available and realistic for you - not foods that look perfect.

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Space to Breathe Therapy

Why an emergency food backup helps

There are days when cooking, shopping or deciding what to eat feels impossible. Stress, low mood, illness, fatigue, sensory overload, pain, executive-function difficulties and changes in appetite can all reduce the capacity needed to prepare food. An emergency food backup is a small collection of manageable options chosen before a difficult day arrives.

The aim is access, not perfection

A backup food does not have to make a complete or ideal meal. It needs to be something you can safely tolerate, reach and eat with the energy you have. Familiarity, texture, temperature, smell, packaging and preparation time may matter as much as nutrition. For someone with ARFID or sensory differences, a reliably safe food can be far more useful than a nutritionally balanced option that cannot be eaten.

A helpful reminder

“Something I can actually eat” is more useful than
“what I would ideally prepare.”

What to consider

- No cooking or very little preparation
- A texture, flavour and temperature you can manage
- A suitable shelf life and easy-to-see storage
- Individual portions or packaging that reduces effort
- Options for home, work, travel and unexpected delays

Your emergency food backup

Fill this in with foods that work for you

Choose a few easy foods you can keep available. There is no correct list. Include safe foods, drinks or nutrition support that meet your own needs, allergies, intolerances and medical guidance.

Cupboard

Examples: crackers, cereal, pouches, tins, snack bars, long-life drinks

Freezer

Examples: tolerated ready meals, bread, portions of soup or familiar foods

Fridge

Examples: ready-to-eat items, yoghurt alternatives, cheese or prepared snacks

Bag or workplace

Examples: sealed snacks, drinks, sensory-safe foods or meal replacements

Check dates occasionally and replace anything used - without judgement.

Make the plan easier to use

Small adjustments can reduce demand

Reduce decisions

Keep a short visible list of backup options. Group items together or label a shelf, basket or freezer drawer so you do not have to search.

Plan for sensory needs

Notice whether packaging noise, smell, temperature, mixed textures or brand changes affect what is manageable. Keep preferred versions where possible.

Include prompts and support

Set a gentle reminder, ask a trusted person to check supplies, or add backup foods to a repeat shopping list. Support is allowed.

Review without blame

If an option stops working, replace it. Appetite and safe foods can change. The plan should adapt to you rather than becoming another rule to follow.

A supportive note

Needing easier food does not mean you have failed. Feeding yourself in a way that is possible today is a form of care. If eating is regularly difficult, intake is very limited, or you are worried about weight, hydration or physical symptoms, seek individual advice from an appropriate health professional.