



Preparedness

for People Living with a Disability or a Chronic Health Condition



There are some simple steps you can take to help you evacuate your home during an emergency. Learn what to do if you have a chronic health condition or disability, by reading this document alongside the Australian Red Cross RediPlan.

Emergencies can strike at any time. They can damage and destroy homes and valuables, may have negative effects on health, disrupt routines, and, in many cases, cause significant financial burdens. The impacts are complex, long-term, and often hidden.

Depending on your circumstances, you might be more at risk to the impacts of an emergency due to a disability or chronic health condition. There might be additional considerations required of you to ensure your safety and wellbeing. For instance, there may be a lack of access – even temporarily – to healthcare, support and essential services, loss or destruction of health aids, as well as financial hardship. The stress of an emergency and aftermath can also exacerbate chronic health conditions and negatively affect a person's mental health.

To minimise the impact on your life, use this guide to work through the Australian Red Cross emergency preparedness guide, RediPlan, with a healthcare professional, partner, carer, or family member. You don't need to complete it all at once – every small step makes a difference.

Before you start

Before you start, consider what you can do to make completing your plan easier.

Get help: Many people benefit from having someone else help complete the RediPlan – they can suggest solutions, remind you of information, and find resources. People who can help you complete the RediPlan include a healthcare professional, partner, friend, carer or family member.

Choose the right time: Ensure you have enough time and energy to complete the RediPlan. Choose a time when you have the most energy. For most people, this will be in the morning.

Be mindful of your energy: You don't have to complete the RediPlan at once.

Prepare Your Mind (RediPlan p.6 & p.24)

- Preparing your mind for emergencies is important, particularly for individuals managing disabilities or chronic health conditions. When emergencies happen, you might feel more stressed or anxious about managing your conditions. Changes to your usual routine can make these feelings even harder, affecting how you respond to emergencies.

- RediPlan provides tips for anticipating potential stressors, identifying personal reactions, and implementing strategies to effectively manage stressful situations (p.6). There's also a useful worksheet on p.24 to help you plan how to handle stress in emergencies and in your everyday life.
- It is important to note that establishing healthy habits before emergencies is crucial for managing stress effectively. When emergencies or stressful times happen, keep an eye on your health. Let your medical team know if things change, like if you're less active or miss your medications, or if your symptoms have changed. It's crucial to recognise and steer clear of bad coping habits, like drinking too much or eating an unhealthy diet. Plan ahead to avoid these behaviours and stay well. If you need help, services like QuitLine and the Butterfly Foundation are there for support.

Step 1: Get in the Know (p.8)

- You need to know the risks you face, how your life might be disrupted and who can help, before you can act.
- Work through the personal assessment worksheet in the RediPlan (p.10). This will help you assess your strengths and where you might need help in dealing with the impacts of an emergency.
- You can do this with a healthcare professional, carer, a friend or a family member, provided you feel comfortable discussing your circumstances with them.

Know your risks

You may want to talk to your medical team about which emergencies will most affect you and what you can do to manage your condition. Consider the potential escalation of needs related to mobility, balance, mood, communication, and cognitive or sensory symptoms during emergencies and plan accordingly. By anticipating that your symptoms or impairments may worsen during an emergency, you are more likely to manage your worries and establish positive coping strategies.

How your life might be disrupted

- After completing the assessment, contemplate how emergencies in your local area, both at home and in the workplace, might impact you and your circumstances. Assess the potential loss of essential services and how it may affect your ability to stay safely in place. Consider your critical support needs and how these might be maintained. Consider factors such as the risk of being cut off from electricity, medical, and support services, as well as specific issues, like bushfire smoke or extreme heat/cold that could exacerbate your condition.
- Determine if there are situations under which you might need to isolate and the level of isolation that you will need. Consider seeking advice from your healthcare provider on this.
- Write down the contact details for important services in your RediPlan (p.28).
- Find out your healthcare provider's policies on how they will maintain your care during an emergency.
- RediPlan also provides space for recording how your disability might affect your ability to respond to an emergency (p.31) in the event of one.

Where to get information in an emergency

- ABC Radio provides regular updates during emergencies, including advice from authorities and support available. You can find your radio frequency at [ABC Local Radio](#). Write it down in your RediPlan (p.28). You can also download the [ABC Listen App](#) so you can listen to your local ABC Radio station wherever you are.
- Keep up to date on emergencies on the [ABC Emergency website](#).
- Follow ABC Australia on [X](#), [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#) to stay up to date with emergency situations.
- Follow the Police, Fire, SES social media feeds.

Step 2: Get Connected (p.16)

Identify a support network

- If you live alone, face challenges with mobility or managing daily living routines, a support network can be helpful. These people can help with getting information for you, or with preparing, evacuating, returning or cleaning your home before and after an emergency. They may also check in on you during an emergency or stay with you while you are isolating.
- Record your support network in your RediPlan (p.27).
- Inform your support network about your RediPlan and your specific needs. This may include alerting you to an emergency, evacuating or transporting you, providing an alternative place to stay, personal care and medical needs. They may need to be trained to assist you or operate the needed equipment; your healthcare team may be able to help you with this.
- Make sure the people in your support network know how to help you.

Communication plan

- Plan for how you will stay in touch with your support network during and after an emergency.
- Maintain a record of emergency contacts with their phone numbers, including details of local services and organisations that can provide help in an emergency. Write these contact details in your RediPlan (pp. 33–34).
- Identify the health workers or counsellors you can talk to in advance, so that if you feel overwhelmed you know who to contact.

Alternative place to stay

- In some emergencies, you might need to evacuate. It's essential to select an alternative place to stay with careful consideration of your medical needs.
- If possible, evacuate to a place that is safe and accessible to you and located close to healthcare services. If this is not possible, see if anyone from your support network would be able to come with you when you evacuate.
- Factors to consider include wheelchair accessibility, availability of a fridge for medication storage, air-conditioning, and access to mobility aids. It is advisable to contact your alternative place to stay to discuss its appropriateness for your specific requirements.
- Write down your alternative place to stay in your RediPlan (p.28).

Step 3: Get Organised (p.18)

Organising the things that will help you gain control after an emergency is the next step to being prepared.

Medical needs

- Keep a comprehensive record of your medical conditions, medications, and aids used.
- RediPlan provides space for recording medical needs, including information about medical equipment medical staff (p.30), medication (p.32), medical aids (p.32).
 - » Medical equipment (p.32) includes everything that helps you e.g. This may include mobility equipment, visual or reading aids, personal care equipment (e.g. continence aids), and adaptive equipment (e.g. shower chairs).
 - » Medical staff (p.30) may include phone numbers for your GP, specialist doctors, nursing staff you see regularly (e.g. MS nurses) and allied health staff (e.g. physiotherapists, optometrists, occupational therapists, speech pathologists).

- Consider including details for alternative health care plans if your primary health team is unavailable or you are unable to reach them (p.34). You may need to staple additional sheets of paper to your plan to record all your information in one place.
- Plan for how you would explain your personal care and medical needs to someone new, consider preparing a written plan for them.
- Smartphone users can utilise the Medical ID function on iPhones or download an ICE (In Case of Emergency) app for Android phones.

Assistance Animals

- If you have an assistance animal, it is also important to think about how to care them in an emergency.
- Consider what your animals need for a week (food and medication) and how you would identify, transport and accommodate them. It is also smart to have a plan in case you can't make it home.
- You can write down your plan for your animals in RediPlan (p.29).

Step 4: Get Packing (p.20)

Packing a kit of items that will help you during and after an emergency is an important way to prepare practically for an emergency.

If you need to isolate at home

Consider how you will get groceries, prescriptions, personal care items, etc.

If you need to evacuate

- Consider packing an emergency kit prior to an event occurring. Suggestions for what to include are listed in the RediPlan (p.21). Make sure to pack your medications and any assistive devices that you will need. Consider how you will get replacements if these are damaged or lost. Recording all your aids, manufacturer, and serial numbers in the RediPlan (p.32) will help you if this does occur.
- You may also want to include items that you do not use often but may be helpful in managing your condition in stressful situations, such as assistive tools to help with a decrease in skills (e.g. picture communication board), repair or replacement items (e.g. batteries, wheelchair repair kit, a mobile phone power bank) and items to make you more comfortable (e.g. ear plugs, plastic sheeting to create a visual isolation area).
- Ensure important information is recorded in a safe place. This may include information such as Medicare cards, health insurance details, contact information for health professionals, memberships numbers and passwords for transport and appointment booking services.
- Consider making duplicates of necessary documents for medical treatments in case your current provider is unavailable.

Remember that individual needs may vary, so tailor these general guidelines to your specific situation. Regularly review and update your plans to reflect any changes in your health or support network.



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