



Cindy Bernstein poses with just some of the food she keeps on hand in the event of inclement weather.

Panic-Proof Pantry

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Ask any retail shop owner how business is the day before a storm is predicted, and you get the same answer: "What business? Everyone is at the supermarkets!"

You can avoid the crowds and chaos but the key, like so many things, is planning ahead. You may not be able to do anything about the weather, but you can do something about your "snow stress" level.

For expert guidance, I checked in with Cindy Bernstein, owner of Aim4Order, a professional organizing service. Voted "Baltimore's Best" organizing expert in 2006, Ms. Bernstein works with homes and businesses to "declutter" and organize clients' papers, keepsakes, hobbies and rooms. She also helps people organize their kitchens and pantry space. She can be reached at 410-484-8328 or through her Web site, aim4order.com.

"People often have four bottles of vanilla, too many dry oreganos or garlic powders. So we go through the cabinets, getting rid of all the extras and out-of-date ones," said Ms. Bernstein, who also suggests keeping a list

whenever you use the last of a pantry item, to make restocking easier.

"Stock an 'edible emergency kit' that might include baking supplies, soups and family games as well as batteries, radios, etc.," she said.

Ms. Bernstein suggests the "see-how-long-we-can-last-without-going-to-the-store" game. She said, "You dig out the stuff that's hidden in the back of the freezer or in the tall or deep shelves that you can't see or reach. Then see if you and your family can eat up all the old stuff to make room for the new."

I asked other people what they always have on hand in case of snow, sleet or other inclement weather. Iris Magid is 27, single and works at the Leukemia Lymphoma Society. Ms. Magid said: "Pasta, pasta sauce, cereal, milk, butter, bottled water and most of all popcorn and ice cream."

A young mom always has peanut butter and whole grain pretzels on hand. "And as long as the power is on, my kids could live on mac and cheese for years," is her answer.

My good friend Sandy Spanos is a real "foodie." "I start stocking up on soups for my freezer in late fall for the winter. For me, homemade soups from the freezer are like money in the bank," said Ms. Spanos. "And muffins," she added, "I could live on assorted yet healthy muffins."

Here are the basics that I always have on hand for emergencies, or for the times I simply don't feel like going out.

The Panic-Proof List

A few onions
Celery (wrap tightly in heavy aluminum foil to keep much longer)
Fresh garlic (crushed, bottled is OK)
Carrots (bags of mini-ones, especially)
Chicken stock or bouillon cubes
Canned beans (kidney or white)
Canned diced tomatoes
Tomato sauce
Bread crumbs
Pasta
Chili powder
Carton of liquid milk (the unrefrigerated ones with a long shelf date)
Butter (keeps great in the freezer)
Milk (fresh milk can be frozen)
Dry milk or liquid milk in cartons
Popcorn
Cream cheese
Flour
Sugar (white and brown)
Unsweetened cocoa
Chocolate chips
Vegetable and olive oil
Frozen lemon juice
Frozen raw challah dough (you only have to let it rise)
Fresh eggs
Bread
Tuna

Meat (at least 1 pound of ground turkey or beef)

Soup fixings: You can have a simmering pot of homemade chicken soup in less than 15 minutes with a few boxes of Libby's Chicken Noodle Soup with Real Chicken Broth and drained canned carrots, slightly "smashed."

OK, what if you still need to rush to the supermarket at the last minute before the flakes start falling? If you find yourself in that situation, you may be able to save a few precious minutes by stopping at the store and grabbing a few essentials, checking out quickly on the eight-items-or-less speed line. Here's what I would grab and go:

1. Bag of salad mix
2. Bunch of grapes
3. Oranges, maybe clementines
4. Grape tomatoes
5. Cooked rotisserie chicken
6. Fresh bagels
7. 100-calorie snack packs
8. Ice cream or yogurt

With a little advance planning and common sense, you can be ready for whatever the weather brings. The most important ingredients to have are a cozy place to be and the knowledge that all the people you love are safe and sound at home. □

Irene Spector is a local freelance writer who writes a monthly Food Talk column and a twice-monthly cooking column for the BALTIMORE JEWISH TIMES.