

Disaster Preparedness for Family Caregivers

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Assisting someone with dementia during a disaster or emergency

Dementia

A condition that affects the brain, causing memory loss, confusion, and changes in thinking and behavior.

How Dementia Affects Older Adults

- Forgetting names, dates, or recent conversations
- Getting lost in familiar places
- Difficulty managing money or medications
- Changes in mood or personality
- Trouble with daily tasks like cooking or dressing

How It Ranges

- **Mild:** Memory lapses but can still live mostly independently
- **Moderate:** Needs help with daily tasks and may become confused more often
- **Severe:** Requires full-time care, major changes in communication and mobility

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Have a Pre-Made Plan and practice

Why it matters

People with dementia often struggle with sudden changes or complex instructions. Having a prepared plan reduces stress and confusion.

What to do

- Identify **exit routes, transportation options, and destinations** ahead of time.
- Practice “dry runs” when the person is calm so they’re familiar with the steps.
- **Pre-register with shelters or emergency services** if possible and inform them that you are caring for someone with cognitive impairment. Many communities have Access & Functional Needs (AFN) registries specifically for this purpose.
- Keep a small “go bag” ready with clothes, hygiene supplies, medications, comfort objects, and copies of important documents.

Access and Functional Needs (AFN) is a term used in emergency planning to describe **people who may need additional help before, during, or after a disaster or emergency** like a power outage, evacuation, or health crisis.

Who is included in AFN?

People who may have **access or functional needs** include those who:

- Depend on **medical equipment** (like oxygen machines, ventilators)
- Have **mobility challenges** (use wheelchairs, walkers)
- Are **blind or visually impaired**
- Are **deaf or hard of hearing**
- Have **cognitive or developmental disabilities**
- Are **older adults**
- Are **non-English speakers**
- Have **mental health conditions**
- Need **assistance with communication, transportation, or personal care**

Why it matters

- In an emergency, AFN individuals might:
- Need **extra time** to evacuate
- Need **accessible shelters**
- Need **power backup for medical devices**
- Need **transportation support**
- Need **information in alternative formats**

How to prepare if you're AFN

- **Register with local emergency services** – Many counties or cities have a “**special needs registry.**”
- **Build a personal emergency plan** – Include backup power, extra medication, oxygen tanks, etc.
- **Inform caregivers and neighbors** – Let them know how to assist you if needed.
- **Have medical info ready** – Print a list of your conditions, medications, and equipment.

Ms. Johnson is a 72-year-old woman who lives alone and relies on an oxygen concentrator, which requires electricity.

During a severe storm, the power went out in her neighborhood, putting her at serious risk because her medical equipment stopped working.

As someone with Access and Functional Needs (AFN), she depends on powered medical devices, has limited mobility, and would require help in an evacuation.

Fortunately, Ms. Johnson had taken key steps to prepare: she registered with her local emergency services and utility company as a priority customer, kept portable oxygen tanks as a backup, and created an emergency "Go Bag" with medications, a flashlight, contact information, and extra supplies.

She also informed her neighbors and caregiver of her situation.

Because of her planning, she was able to switch safely to her backup oxygen, stay calm, and remain safe until the power was restored (which she had priority to have restored).

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Keep ID & Medical Info Visible

- **Why it matters:**

If the person becomes separated or disoriented, responders need quick access to key information.

- **What to do:**

- Use **medical ID bracelets, necklaces, or wallet cards** listing their name, diagnosis (dementia), caregiver phone number, and allergies.
- Place a **paper copy** of this information in their pocket or pinned to clothing.
- Keep **copies of medication lists, physician contacts, and insurance cards** in a waterproof bag in the go bag.
- Consider GPS-enabled devices (bracelets, watches, or smartphone apps) if wandering is a risk.

Free GPS or Tracking Programs for Dementia in California

Program/Device	Region/County	Free?	Type	Best For
L.A. Found (Project Lifesaver)	Los Angeles County	✓	RF bracelet (law enforcement locates)	Residents with dementia or autism at risk of wandering
Alzheimer's San Diego GPS Pilot	San Diego County	✓	GPS device + app (3 months service)	Families needing GPS tracking & caregiver alerts
Project Lifesaver – Elk Grove PD	Elk Grove (Sacramento Co.)	✓	RF bracelet	Local residents with Alzheimer's, autism, dementia
Project Lifesaver – Auburn PD	Auburn (Placer County)	✓	RF bracelet	Local residents prone to wandering
Sacramento City Pilot Program	Sacramento City	✓	RF bracelet	High-risk residents w/ wandering behaviors






Additional Resources (Non-Device or Paid Options)

Program/Device	Region/County	Free?	Type	Best For**
Healthy Brain Initiative (HBI)	Sacramento County	✗	Education, planning support	Caregiver training and safety planning
CAIz Connect Program	Marin, Imperial, Ventura	✗	Care navigation and support	No device included; caregiver education
AngelSense, GPS SmartSole, etc.	Statewide / National	✗	GPS wearables (subscriptions)	Tech-enabled tracking and caregiver alerts
Apple AirTag / Tile	Statewide / National	✗	Bluetooth tags	Short-range tracking via smartphone
MedicAlert + Safe Return	Nationwide	Partial Pay	ID bracelet + 24/7 hotline	Wandering support and ID for emergencies



County / City	Program Status	Device Fee	Type	Eligibility
Ventura County	Available in select cities	Free	RF bracelet	Should wander, dementia/Alzheimer’s
Santa Barbara County	Active	~\$400 initial + \$125/year	RF bracelet	Cognitive impairment diagnosis
Placer County (Auburn & Lincoln)	Active	Free	RF bracelet	Residents with cognitive diagnoses
Amador County	Active	Free	RF bracelet	Eligible based on condition & caregiving

Full Name	How They Help During Power Outages or Disasters	Who It Helps
Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Medical Baseline Program provides priority outage notifications and extended energy allowance - Portable backup power solutions available through nonprofit partners - REACH program offers emergency bill credits to help restore power 	Northern & Central CA residents; medical device users; low-income customers
San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Medical Baseline Program gives early PSPS alerts & extra energy allowance - Portable backup batteries via CPUC and local partners - Neighbor-to-Neighbor Fund provides financial relief after disasters or hardship 	San Diego & South Orange County residents; vulnerable and low-income customers
Southern California Edison (SCE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Critical Care Backup Battery Program (CCBB) provides free battery kits to qualified customers in fire-prone areas - Medical Baseline includes priority notification and protection - PSPS preparedness outreach and support tools 	Southern California customers; wildfire zone residents; medical equipment users
Southern California Gas Company (SoCalGas)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offers energy-saving tips and bill assistance during emergencies - Coordinates with electric utilities for broader disaster relief 	Southern California gas utility customers

Program / Utility	 Battery Backup Access	 Priority Notification	 Medical Baseline Protection	 Bill Relief	 Disaster Coordination
PG&E (<i>Pacific Gas & Electric</i>)	✅ Through partner orgs (limited)	✅ Via Medical Baseline	✅ Medical Baseline Program	✅ REACH program	⚠️ Limited (via county)
SDG&E (<i>San Diego Gas & Electric</i>)	✅ Through CPUC/partners	✅ Via Medical Baseline	✅ Medical Baseline Program	✅ Neighbor-to-Neighbor	⚠️ Limited (county/city)
SCE (<i>Southern California Edison</i>)	✅ CCBB Program (free batteries for qualified)	✅ With Medical Baseline & PSPS alerts	✅ Medical Baseline Program	✅ Energy Assistance Fund	⚠️ Minimal direct services
LADWP (<i>Los Angeles Dept. of Water & Power</i>)	❌ (No battery program listed)	✅ Critical Care List alerts	✅ Life-Support Device Discount	✅ Life-Support Discount	⚠️ City may assist
SoCalGas (<i>Gas only</i>)	❌ (No backup power — gas utility)	❌	❌	✅ Bill assistance programs	⚠️ Supports regional response
LIHEAP (<i>Statewide</i>)	⚠️ Some counties may offer batteries	❌	❌	✅ Crisis utility payment help	✅ In declared emergencies
DDAR (<i>Statewide – Disability Disaster Access Resource</i>)	✅ Helps access batteries/charging	✅ Outreach before PSPS/wildfires	⚠️ Not a baseline program, but helps disabled clients	❌ (Not a utility aid program)	✅ Strong coordination, evacuation help

Los Angeles Dept. of Water & Power (LADWP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintains a Critical Care list for outage response prioritization - Offers Life-Support Equipment Discount to reduce electric bills - Encourages emergency contact updates to ensure communication during events 	City of Los Angeles residents using electrically powered life-sustaining equipment
Local City Utilities (e.g., Riverside, Burbank, Glendale)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offer one-time bill credits or hardship support (e.g. Project Share, Helping Hand) - May support outage notification and priority lists for medically dependent Customers - Some provide contact registration for emergency alerts 	Local city utility customers; low-income or medically vulnerable residents
Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) <i>(Statewide)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emergency utility bill assistance for disconnections or power crises - Crisis grants available during wildfires, heatwaves, or other Disasters - Some local agencies may offer backup power or prep kits 	Low-income households across California
Disability Disaster Access & Resource Program (DDAR) <i>(Statewide)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides emergency planning, backup power access, transportation, and coordination for disaster readiness - Focused on PSPS and wildfire risk areas - Helps before, during, and after outages 	People with disabilities or electricity-dependent medical needs statewide

Assisting someone with dementia during a disaster or emergency

- **Use Familiar Transportation**
- **Why it matters:** Unfamiliar settings can increase anxiety, agitation, or resistance. Familiar vehicles and routines reduce confusion.
- **What to do:**
 - Use the **same vehicle** and, if possible, the **same seat** they usually sit in (passenger seat or favorite spot).
 - **Bring familiar sensory cues** like their favorite music, blanket, or pillow to maintain comfort.
 - Limit noise, crowds, and unnecessary changes to the routine during transport.
 - If public transport or emergency buses must be used, keep comfort objects close and stay beside them.

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- **Assign a Buddy**
- **Why it matters:** Managing both logistics and emotional care alone is overwhelming and unsafe.
- **What to do:**
 - Assign **two roles**:
 - **Emotional Support:** One person focuses on staying calm, holding hands, providing reassurance, and redirecting behavior.
 - **Logistics & Safety:** Another person handles supplies, route planning, and communication with emergency responders.
 - If traveling alone with the person, ask shelter volunteers or responders to temporarily assist as a “buddy.”

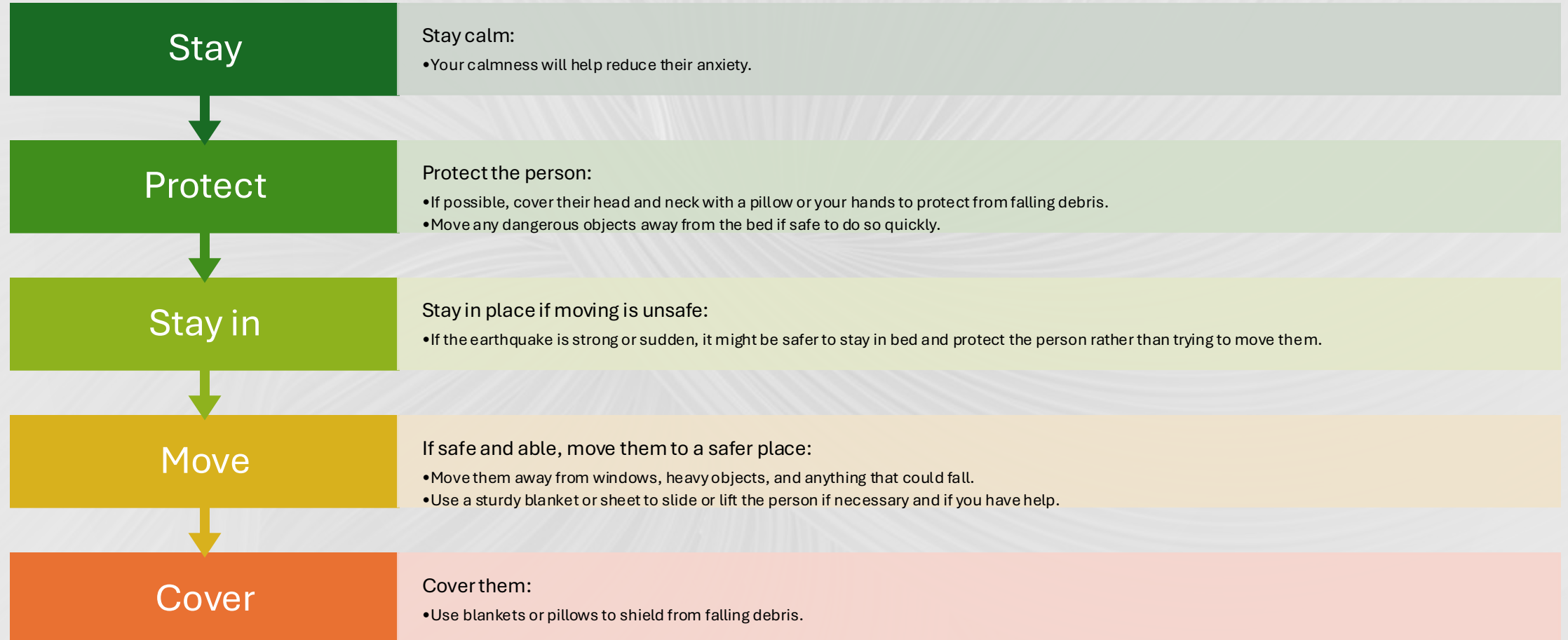
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- **Alert Emergency Personnel**
- **Why it matters:** Responders need to know about cognitive impairments so they can adapt communication and safety procedures.
- **What to do:**
 - Clearly tell responders: **“This person has dementia and may be confused, may not understand instructions, or wander.”**
 - Request placement in **quiet, low-stimulation areas** of shelters when available.
 - Make sure the person is added to any **Access & Functional Needs (AFN)** lists for priority support.

Disaster Preparation

1. **Secure the room:**
 - a. Anchor heavy furniture and appliances.
 - b. Keep the bed away from windows, shelves, or anything that could fall.
2. **Emergency supplies:**
 - a. Keep a small emergency kit nearby with water, medications, a flashlight, whistle, and a phone.
3. **Create a plan:**
 - a. Practice earthquake drills specifically for helping the bedbound person.
 - b. Identify the safest place in the room to move them if possible (e.g., away from windows, heavy furniture).
4. **Communicate with caregivers:**
 - a. Everyone involved should know their roles during an emergency.

During an Earthquake: Immediate Actions



During an emergency : Evacuation Plan

- Call 911 (if possible) and inform them of a bedbound individual
- Stay calm and reassure the person
- Check for fire, smoke, or debris blocking exits
- Cover the person with a blanket to
- Place slide sheet or sturdy blanket under body
- Support head, neck, and limbs
- Secure oxygen or medical devices if needed
- Drag or guide person to exit using sheet
- Avoid stairs unless using an evacuation chair
- Keep body aligned and avoid twisting
- Protect from bumps and injury along the way

For seniors using a cane.



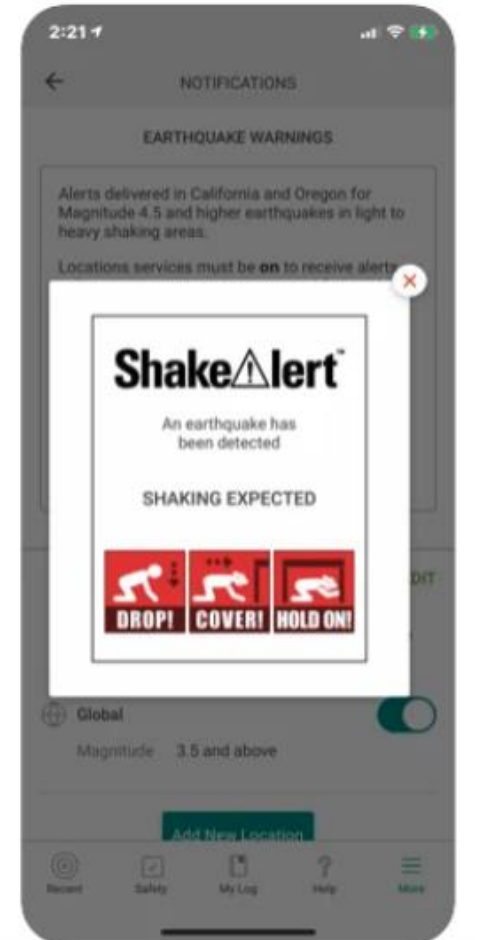
For seniors using a wheelchair.



For seniors using a walker.



MyShake APP



Keeping Medications Cool During Power Outages

Use a Travel Medication Cooler

- Choose an insulated bag with gel packs and temperature control

Freeze & Wrap Gel Packs

- Freeze overnight
- Wrap in cloth to prevent freezing the meds

Pack Smart

- Take meds from fridge last minute
- Place between gel packs, not directly on them
- Keep cooler closed & out of the sun

Monitor Temperature

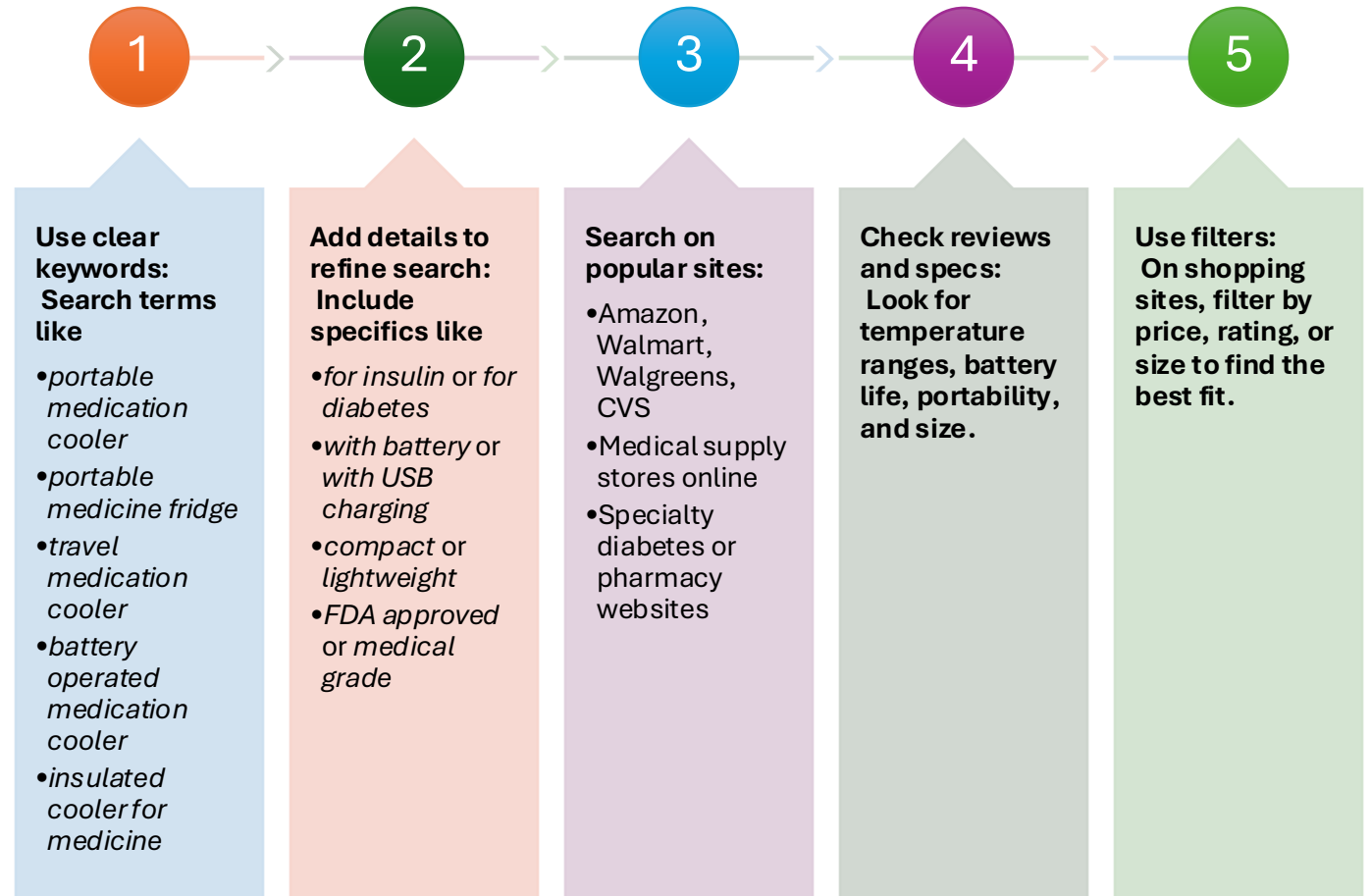
- Some meds tolerate room temp briefly know your limits
- Use a thermometer if you're out for long

Backup Plan

- Carry a copy of your prescription
- Know what to do if the med gets too warm



How to find portable medication coolers online



How to Get Portable Medication Coolers for Free or Low Cost

Check with Your Healthcare Provider or Pharmacist

- Some clinics or pharmacies provide free or loaner coolers for patients who need to keep medications like insulin cold.
- Ask if they have any patient assistance programs or samples.

Reach Out to Medication Manufacturers

- Companies like **Novo Nordisk, Eli Lilly, or Sanofi** sometimes offer free or discounted insulin travel coolers if you contact their patient support programs.
- Visit their official websites or call their patient assistance hotlines.

Nonprofit Organizations and Support Groups

- Groups supporting diabetes, autoimmune diseases, or chronic illnesses sometimes give away free cooling products or provide grants.
- Examples: **JDRF (Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation), American Diabetes Association.**

Local Health Departments or Community Clinics

- Some public health programs provide emergency medication storage supplies for vulnerable populations.

Insurance Coverage or Medicaid

- In some cases, durable medical equipment (DME) coverage may include cooling devices. Check with your insurer.

Online Freecycle, Facebook Groups, or Community Boards

- Sometimes people give away medical supplies, including coolers.

1. Have a Backup Power Source

- **Oxygen concentrators need electricity.** If you're using one, you need a **battery backup** or **generator**.
- **Ask your provider** if your machine comes with:
 - A **portable oxygen tank**
 - A **rechargeable battery** (some last 2–8 hours)
 - Or if they can supply you with emergency backup equipment

2. Keep Portable Oxygen Tanks on Hand

- These do **not need power** and can be used while electricity is out.
- Keep at least **one full tank available at all times** in case of emergency.
- Make sure you **know how to switch** from your concentrator to the tank.

3. Inform Your Power Company

- Register as a **“life-sustaining equipment customer”** with your utility company.
- They may prioritize your home in outages or offer **advance notice** of planned outages.



4. Call 911 if Needed

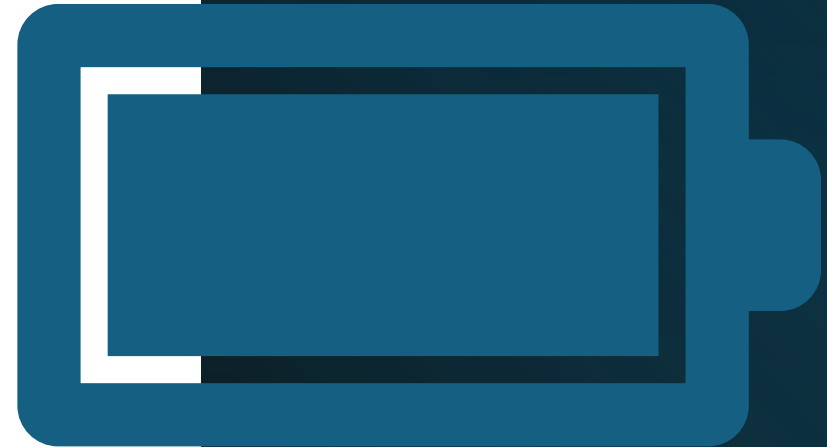
- If you lose power and **have no backup**, or your oxygen runs low, call **911 immediately**.
- Emergency responders can assist with oxygen supply during a crisis.

5. Create an Emergency Plan

- Let family, neighbors, or caregivers know your condition and plan.
- Keep a printed list of:
 - Your oxygen settings and type
 - Emergency contacts
 - Backup equipment locations
 - Instructions for switching tanks

6. Be Prepared for Extended Outages

- Consider investing in:
 - A **portable generator** (only use outdoors or in ventilated areas)
 - A **power bank or battery inverter** compatible with your concentrator
- Talk to your doctor about **how long you can safely go without oxygen**, and what to do in that scenario.



- Disaster Prep Tips for Electric Wheelchair Users

1. Backup Power & Charging

- Keep a **fully charged spare battery** and charger ready.
- Invest in a **portable power bank or inverter** compatible with your wheelchair.
- Have a **manual wheelchair** available as a backup in case power runs out.

Free Backup Power Options for Electric Wheelchair Users

- **Southern California Edison (SCE) – Critical Care Backup Battery Program**
 - **Eligibility:** Residents enrolled in SCE's Medical Baseline Allowance program, residing in high fire-risk areas, and dependent on electrically powered medical equipment.
 - **Offerings:** Free portable backup batteries with solar panel kits to power medical devices during outages. Delivery and setup are included at no cost.
 - **How to Apply:** Call SCE at 1-800-736-4777
- **Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) – Portable Battery Program**
 - **Eligibility:** PG&E customers who rely on medical devices and have experienced power shutoffs or outages.
 - **Offerings:** Backup portable batteries to power medical and assistive devices during outages.
 - **How to Apply:** Visit [PG&E's Portable Battery Program](#) for more information.
- **Ventura County – SCE's Critical Care Backup Battery Program**
 - **Eligibility:** SCE customers in Ventura County enrolled in the Medical Baseline program and dependent on medical equipment.
 - **Offerings:** Free portable backup batteries with solar panel kits to power medical devices during outages. Delivery and setup are included at no cost.
 - **How to Apply:** Call SCE at 1-800-736-4777
- **Triumph Foundation – Equipment & Supply Exchange**
 - **Eligibility:** Individuals in need of adapted equipment and supplies.
 - **Offerings:** A platform to connect those in need with donors of durable medical goods.
 - **How to Apply:** Visit [Triumph Foundation's Exchange](#) to browse available items

What to Do with Medical Airflow Beds / Mattresses During a Power Outage

- **Know Your Equipment**
 - Identify if your mattress requires continuous power (e.g., alternating pressure, low air loss).
 - Understand how long your mattress can maintain pressure relief without power.
- **Have Backup Power**
 - Keep a **backup battery** or **portable power source** compatible with your mattress pump.
 - Some manufacturers offer battery backup options check with your supplier or healthcare provider.
- **Manual Support Plan**
 - If backup power is unavailable, switch to a **manual pressure relief schedule** (repositioning every 2 hours) to reduce risk of pressure ulcers.
 - Use cushions or overlays to help relieve pressure temporarily.
- **Prepare Emergency Supplies**
 - Keep extra pillows or foam wedges on hand to support repositioning.
 - Have wound care supplies accessible if needed.
- **Communicate Your Needs**
 - Inform caregivers, family, or emergency responders about your reliance on powered medical equipment.
 - Register with local emergency management agencies if they offer a **special needs registry**.
- **Practice Your Plan**
 - Regularly review and practice your contingency plan for power outages.
 - Train caregivers on manual repositioning techniques.
 - Important Tips
- **Do not remove the mattress or stop therapy without guidance from your healthcare provider.**
- **Call your equipment provider for advice on battery backups or emergency support.**
- **Document and keep important contact info handy.**

Thank you

Q&A

If you have any questions email

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