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If You Don't Know What You Have, You Don't Know What You Need!

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There are a lot of great [food storage calculators](#) ^[1] out there that can tell you how much food you need to support your family through a month, 3 months or a year. It's important to use these to figure out what your family's needs are.

While it's vital to know how much food you require, just as important is to figure out how to arrive at that amount. Building a well-balanced food pantry is about way more than a few big shopping trips to Costco.

First things first, you need to do a [detailed inventory](#) ^[2]. If you don't know what you have, you don't know what you need.

I made a spreadsheet based on the numbers from the Food Storage Calculator. I also added fruits and vegetables to the spreadsheet.

I created the following columns:

- Amount on hand
- 3 month supply
- Amount needed for 3 month supply
- 1 year supply
- Amount needed for 1 year supply

You could also break the sheet down further by creating columns for different time periods (1 month, 6 month, 9 month, etc.) [See Copy of FOOD STOCKPILE](#) ^[3]

Today I spent a few hours pulling everything out of my various cupboards, shelves and hidey-holes. I counted, measured and added up the contents of my food storage. While I was at it, with my hands on every single item, I took a moment to check the expiration dates to rotate in any items that were nearing the deadline.

I had been pretty happy with my food storage situation, admiring my nice little rows of soups and big jars of flour.

But then I plugged the numbers into the spreadsheet I had built...

And I was shocked to find that all that food doesn't *QUITE* get me to a 3 month food supply for my family and me!

So, all the canning, the drying, the repackaging and the purchasing didn't add up to nearly as much as I thought it did. While I was pretty bummed, I'd certainly rather find that out now instead of later, when I'm depending on that food.

From this analysis, I was happy to discover we have more than enough beans, sweeteners, fats and fruits and vegetables for 3 months.

The downside is that I'm nearly 50 pounds short of grains, 30 pounds short of dry milk and only slightly short of meat.

This can be an overwhelming project, especially when you fall short of the amount of food you thought you had. But you don't know what you need unless you perform frequent and accurate inventories of your supplies.

Especially if you are new to prepping, don't start out trying to load up and get a year's supply of food. Go small and work on stocking [one month](#) ^[4] at a time, working from your list so that you don't replenish grains in an already grain-heavy cupboard. Keep the end result in mind, which is a nutritionally balanced one-year [long-term food supply](#) ^[5] with a reasonable amount of variety.

Break it down and work on acquiring a supply as you can, whether that is a month at a time or even a week at a time. Every one-day supply of food that you have put away from your family is one day that you know they will not be hungry.

Another benefit to keeping things balanced when purchasing for your pantry is that it is more economical – instead of buying more expensive items (like meat) all at once, you can break those purchases up with less expensive grains to keep you on budget.

When making additions to your long-term food supply, be sure to add them to your inventory spreadsheet and recalculate your needs. I keep a running list of my needs in my wallet so I can take advantage of great sales without having a pantry that is out of proportion. I've made a list from the flyers and every time I complete another month's worth of a food category, I'm sure I will feel a little rush of accomplishment!

Remember, you don't know what you need unless you know what you have!

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URL to article: http://readynutrition.com/resources/if-you-dont-know-what-you-have-you-dont-know-what-you-need_02102012/

URLs in this post:

[1] food storage calculators:

<http://readynutrition.com/resources/category/preparedness/calculators/>

[2] detailed inventory: http://readynutrition.com/resources/week-31-of-52-inventory-management_13012012/

[3] See Copy of FOOD STOCKPILE: http://readynutrition.com/resources/if-you-dont-know-what-you-have-you-dont-know-what-you-need_02102012/copy-of-food-stockpile-2/

[4] one month: http://readynutrition.com/resources/week-20-of-52-1-month-supply-of-food_16092011/

[5] long-term food supply: http://readynutrition.com/resources/week-45-of-52-long-term-food-and-water-needs_18052012/

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